

# The Philanthropy and Patriotism of a Forgotten Benefactor of Transylvania

Vasile Stroescu (1845–1926)

---

RADU ROMÎNAȘU, LAURA ARDELEAN

**L**IKE MANY of Vasile Stroescu's contemporaries, we, in turn, may ask ourselves: "Who was, in fact, Vasile Stroescu?" The interrogation is a legitimate one and regardless of the possible answers we can get—through a quick recourse to historiography—one fact remains certain: the name of this Bessarabian philanthropic boyar is mentioned far too rarely in both Romania and Bessarabia. Although he made an essential contribution through his donations to the preservation and consolidation of the Romanian language and culture, posterity rarely remembers him. We are talking about the personality who directly contributed, through plenary militancy and self-sacrifice, to the achievement of the Great Union of 1918 and, later, to its consolidation in the interwar period.

Looking back on the Romanian national history of the last two centuries, we can easily see that God ordained in the midst of the Romanians some *key people*, who were able to show clearly, through generosity and an imposing spirit of sacrifice, the path toward the prosperity of the nation in which they were born and activated. Vasile Stroescu (1845–1926)<sup>1</sup> was also part of this register of human typology.

Coming from a large family with 15 children, Vasile Stroescu was the youngest one. He attended primary and secondary school in Chișinău, and after that he attended high school in Kamianets-Podilskyi (Ukraine) and Odessa (Richelieu High School). He continued his education by studying law in Sankt Petersburg, Berlin and Moscow, although he really wanted to complete his studies in Bucharest.<sup>2</sup> From his parents he inherited estates situated in several localities in Bessarabia, with a total area of up to 9,000 hectares. He later got to manage the family's fortune, and, according to documentary sources, he managed to triple it in just three years. New land acquisitions followed, his estates reaching a total 25,000 hectares. In addition to these, Stroescu also had numerous stallions, cattle herds and flocks of sheep. The agriculture practiced on his estates was a high-performance one, with the latest technical equipment and using crop rotation.<sup>3</sup>

Research funded by the University of Oradea, within the Grants Competition "Scientific Research of Excellence Related to Priority Areas with Capitalization Through Technology Transfer: INO-TRANSFER-UO," Project No. 314/21.12.2021.

The personality of such people appears even more prominent to us today, especially as we live in a world that increasingly disavows its coordinates, mixes its contents more and more chaotically and intensely overlooks priorities in order to evade the really important questions for the destiny of the people.

In the current historiography one can identify a considerable amount of information about the personality of the Bessarabian boyar Vasile Stroescu. However, referring to the same Romanian historiography, one can acutely feel the need for truthful and solid historical retrospectives, in order to offer to the contemporary society a worthy model, which the young generation needs so much. Because if we want to prepare ourselves for the future, we must follow our path by constantly checking our conscience, with an honest relation with the past, which some contemporary “elitist” groups want to see volatilized and abandoned, as a landmark.

In fact, no other public or private person from high aristocratic circles or from the sphere of political life at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the next one donated sums as substantial to Romanian schools and churches as the great patron from Bessarabia. Disinterestedly, without being an intermediary between the state institutions and the Romanian communities from the historical provinces under foreign domination, Vasile Stroescu constantly supported financially the cultural institutions on both sides of the Carpathians. He followed the example of his father, who, together with his older brother Mihail (1836–1889),<sup>4</sup> supported the Romanian schools and churches in Bessarabia, as far as the tsarist authorities allowed it. Thus, Stroescu improved the economic situation of many Bessarabian peasants, to whom he leased plots of land at modest prices, and others were actually bequeathed land by the magnanimous boyar. Also, those who worked on his large estates had the status of free peasants and received cattle and land.<sup>5</sup> Stroescu loved Bessarabia, considering that its wealth lay in the land and its people:

*It is a land of promise . . . In a short time, if justice is assured to the people, if the government takes care of its good condition and its influence, Bessarabia will truly become one of the happiest lands in the world.*<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of his philanthropic actions was the cultural upliftment of those being at the base of the social pyramid, the peasantry, through school instruction and targeted cultural events:

*Take care of the Moldavian culture—Stroescu proposed to the Romanian intellectuals in Bessarabia. The poor; they were left in the most terrible darkness . . . Organize economic, social, moral, historical conferences; print newspapers, magazines, brochures, books, set up reading houses, cultural houses; train itinerant speakers to roam the country teaching the people . . . , set up high schools like in Denmark or; better, a Popular University.*<sup>7</sup>

In the Romanian Old Kingdom, Vasile Stroescu donated over half a million lei, money from which more than thirty schools were built, especially in counties with poor economic activity, such as Neamț, Dorohoi and Botoșani. Transylvania enjoyed a very

special attention from the great patron. The draconian provisions of the laws of 1872, 1879, 1883, 1891 and 1907 issued by the Hungarian governments within the bicephalous monarchy threatened the existence of Romanian confessional schools. As a result, the boyar came to their aid promptly. Specialists estimate that between 1910 and 1913 the amount donated for this province rose to around 950,000 crowns. After that, just the cultural fund of Blaj received, as a donation, the amount of 1,000,000 crowns. An additional 300.000 was added for the cultural fund of Sibiu, 100,000 to the Metropolitan of Transylvania and 102,000 lei as a basic fund for the government in Bucharest in order to build an imposing cathedral for the Romanian people, as a symbol of the Romanian national and religious unity. In 1906, another 200,000 lei were donated for the cathedral. Unfortunately, this was not built due to multiple causes that we shall not insist on here.<sup>8</sup> Thus, almost two hundred schools and over one hundred and thirty Romanian churches were saved. All the figures mentioned here are approximate, as numerous donations and gifts, made out of generosity and love for the Romanian people, came under the protection of anonymity. From this perspective, the evangelical exhortation: “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt. 6:3) was fully applied by the great Bessarabian patriot. It is no coincidence that N. Iorga called him “the great man of good deeds and the generous benefactor.” Moreover, Romulus Teculescu, a Romanian Orthodox archpriest from Alba Iulia, dedicated to him a church hymn suggestively entitled “Omagiu marelui mecenat Vasile Stroescu” (Homage to the great Maecenas Vasile Stroescu).<sup>9</sup> In its turn, in 1910, the Romanian Old Kingdom, through the agency of the City Hall of Bucharest, named a street in the capital with its name as a sign of appreciation.<sup>10</sup> However, the figures established following the analysis and comparison of the published information with the unpublished ones are meant to complete the impressive scale of the Bessarabian boyar’s philanthropic work.

Stroescu never fell prey to denominational divisions. Therefore, he supported both the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church. Thus, one by one, the Orthodox Seminary in Arad, the Gymnasium in Brad, the Girls’ School of Arad (10,000 crowns), Romanian confessional schools in Alba, Bihor, Braşov, Cluj, Hunedoara, Maramureş, Mureş, Sălaj, Sibiu, Timiş counties, and in Covasna and Sebeş received cumulatively from the Bessarabian boyar hundreds of thousands of crowns. Thousands of Romanian pupils and students who were studying in the country or in Budapest and Vienna were supported with scholarships (The Vasile Stroescu Fund). Moreover, under the auspices of the ASTRA cultural association, of the Transylvanian Metropolitan Ioan Meţianu, and under the careful and efficient economic calculations of Partenie Cosma, the president of the Albina Bank in Sibiu, Stroescu’s financial contributions were directed to the poorest young scholars, but also for the printing of Romanian books, a total of 140,000 copies of the creations of M. Eminescu, I. Creangă, I. Agârbiceanu, I. Slavici, V. Alecsandri, G. Coşbuc, A. Pann, I. Lupaş being distributed in the Romanian Old Kingdom, Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina. As a result, the book collections of 300 rural libraries in the Romanian space increased.<sup>11</sup>

In the first part of 1917, the philanthropist Stroescu was in San Francisco, where he heard the news of the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. He decided to repatriate in

order to be close to his brothers who were experiencing the effervescence of revitalizing the Bessarabian national movement. After several inquiries in Odessa (he hated any kind of political engagement), he agreed to become honorary president of the Moldavian National Party and to patronize the Moldavian Cultural Society. He was also the soul of the national renaissance of the Romanians in Bessarabia, having contributed since 1905–1907 with significant sums of money to the publication of the newspapers *Cuvânt Moldovenesc* (The Moldavian word) (edited by Nicolae Alixandri and Pan Halippa), *Basarabia* (Bessarabia), *Școala Moldovenească* (The Moldavian school), *Ardealul* (Transylvania), and *România Nouă* (New Romania). Initially, for the editorial office of *Cuvânt Moldovenesc*, he donated 60 rubles per month, and after 1917 the amount rose to 10,000. In addition, the office received a wagonful of paper.<sup>12</sup>

After the Great Union, he was appointed as the most senior member of the reunified Romanian Parliament, on which occasion he spoke at the opening of the first solemn meeting of the Chamber and the Senate, in the presence of the king and the government, in which he stated, full of emotion, that the Union had been achieved by the Romanian people themselves.<sup>13</sup> On 29 December 1919, he read the draft bill on the union of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania, an act approved unanimously by the Chamber of Deputies. Vasile Stroescu was also elected an honorary member of the Romanian Academy, and towards the end of his life he laid the foundations of the League of Human Rights.

In 1902, his will, by which his charitable works were to be continued, was authenticated by the notary Gheorghe Gore (the father of the national leader Pavel Gore). According to it, his estate at Trinca was to be administered by the governmental zemstva or the institution that would take its place, provided that the land was still leased to the peasants at average prices, a school of agriculture was built and the church maintained. The rest of his possessions was to be owned by the Romanian Ministry of Public Instruction, provided that new schools were built, especially in the poorest villages. In March 1918, the patriotic boyar drafted a new will (he was to undergo surgery in Paris), according to which he left all his fortune to the same Bessarabian institution, which was to set up Romanian language schools. If the testamentary conditions could not be honored, then Romania would benefit from its wealth, the conditions being the same.<sup>14</sup>

So, it is not surprising that the name of the Bessarabian boyar Vasile Stroescu remained forever etched in the consciousness of Romanians for his patronage activities through which he supported Romanian culture, first in Bessarabia and Moldavia, and later in Transylvania, at a time that foreshadowed the changes that would take place at the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the first world conflagration and its aftermath.

The establishment and support of schools, but also the construction of churches, was a priority for the great Bessarabian patron. He considered education an essential factor for the propagation and development of Romanian culture. In this regard, he donated large sums of money in the form of scholarships granted to young people willing to study and allocated money for the printing of books, the creation of village libraries, etc. His own statement is emblematic in this regard: “Books and books again! Schools and schools again! Churches and churches again! Through them we will uplift our souls

and we will be masters of knowledge...”<sup>15</sup> His charitable actions also included funding for various hospitals and orphanages. He did not tire of supporting the activity of the Romanian cultural institutions, and here we definitely mention the special attention he had for the ASTRA, founded by the elite of the Romanian Transylvanian intellectuals. This is what Sextil Pușcariu wrote about Stroescu:

*One day, we read in the newspapers that a Bessarabian boyar had offered to the Association in Sibiu an amount the size of which I could not exactly recall, but which was about 1,000,000 crowns, something fantastic at that time. Other gifts soon followed, and in Transylvania there was almost no church that did not receive the requested help from Stroescu.*<sup>16</sup>

*Two hundred and twenty thousand crowns had been made available in 1910 to our Metropolitan See of Sibiu and one hundred thousand to that of Blaj; another ten thousand had been donated to our diocesan Consistory; 100,000 crowns to the Women’s Association in Arad, for the upkeep of the girls’ school there, and throughout the country countless other smaller sums for various settlements that lacked the necessary means. In order to save our schools threatened by the draconian postulates of the Apponyi Laws, he sacrificed at least one million crowns, a formidable sum at that time.*<sup>17</sup>

The great philanthropist made land available to the peasants and made donations for the establishment of village cooperatives and people’s banks, supporting ASTRA’s actions. He did it wholeheartedly, with the best of intentions, for those in great need of help: “I was happy to come to the aid of the Romanian villages, giving my contribution. In my letter I asked to be informed about other cultural societies in Transylvania and Hungary.”<sup>18</sup> The amount of the monetary donations he made is quite difficult to quantify, due to the fact that the financial support was often granted anonymously, so it is not possible to establish exactly the sum he channeled toward different institutions in order to promote Romanian culture.

**H**IS INTEREST in the situation of the Romanians, manifested in his altruism for the promotion of the Romanians both culturally and economically, did not go unnoticed by the Hungarian authorities, especially after the Bessarabian boyar turned his attention to Transylvania. So, it is not a surprise that the Hungarian press of the time began to be interested in his personality and lamented as his charitable work multiplied. He began to be considered an enemy, accused of supporting actions aimed to disrupt the country’s stability.

At first, the press in Budapest published news on the philanthropist Vasile Stroescu and on the donations made by the generous boyar, but in time they began to acquire a tone of reproach, his actions arousing the suspicion of the Hungarian authorities as they were potentially detrimental to the interests of the Hungarian state. Going through the pages of four newspapers of the time from Budapest, one can see how the person of the Bessarabian patron became increasingly unwelcome and disliked, being considered one of the main agents who stirred the national feelings of Transylvanian Romanians.

In 1910, the newspaper *Az Újság* (The newspaper)<sup>19</sup> reported on a donation of 100,000 crowns to the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Blaj made by “a certain Stroescu Vazul,” a Romanian from Bessarabia, and then another 300,000 crowns to the Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Sibiu,<sup>20</sup> which made him the supporter of the Romanians who were striving to set up a fund for the Romanian schools, severely affected by the Apponyi Laws of education that had come into force in 1907. The construction of the High School in Brad was started with the 100,000 crowns donated by Stroescu, who was considered this time a “well-known Romanian Bessarabian millionaire.”<sup>21</sup> Housed in a building erected with financial resources from the Orthodox Diocese and the Victoria Bank,<sup>22</sup> the Girls’ School<sup>23</sup> was supported by Vasile Stroescu, who contributed a sum of 100,000 crowns.<sup>24</sup> According to the Hungarian press, after a news report taken from the newspaper *Románul* (The Romanian), Stroescu Vazul was also to attend the inauguration ceremony of the new building of the Romanian high school, which was scheduled for 7 September 1913.<sup>25</sup>

In the pages of another newspaper, *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest newspaper),<sup>26</sup> from 1910, a short notice appeared that Stroescu Vazul, a fabulously rich Bessarabian landowner, in a letter addressed to the Women’s Association in Arad, expressed his desire to support a school with 100,000 crowns and a boarding school for girls in Arad. Recent donations to the cultural funds in Blaj (100,000 crowns), Sibiu (220,000 crowns) and Arad (10,000 crowns)<sup>27</sup> are also mentioned, outlining that Stroescu, due to the Russian oppression, could not help the Bessarabian Romanians, so he had turned his attention to the Romanians in Hungary.

A year later, the newspaper reported that the Romanians in the country (referring here to Hungary), dissatisfied with the results of political activities, had set up economic organizations in certain villages.<sup>28</sup> The purpose was allegedly to set up credit cooperatives in every commune with Romanian inhabitants. According to the newspaper, no Hungarian members were allowed. The organization of the cooperatives was going too slow, but it seemed that “a millionaire Romanian boyar from Russia” had made 50,000 crowns available to the ASTRA in order to hasten their founding, promising other aid if they were successful. The newspaper drew attention to actions that had been almost overlooked and which aimed at national dismemberment, the creation of a “Romanian branch that in time will not be Romania’s neighbor, but even an organic part of it,”<sup>29</sup> hinting that a union of the Romanians in Transylvania with those in Romania was the real goal.

In 1912, the same newspaper reproached Vasile Stroescu for supporting the ASTRA, which, under the pretext of promoting Romanian culture, had embraced the economic interests of Romanians and established cooperationist credit institutions in villages.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the signatory of the article considered that without the financial resources provided by the boyar, as 50,000 crowns had been given to the ASTRA, this would not have had a chance of success. He immediately sent three officials to foreign banks in Romania and Germany to study the ways to cooperate. Vasile Osvadă “recently reported to the Astra’s Central Committee the results of his studies and, in particular, that Stroescu had again given money,” namely, about 100,000 crowns, for promoting cooperationist



ideas and putting them into practice.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Romanian millionaire donated 12,000 crowns to the Petru Maior Romanian Student Association in Budapest, with the intention of contributing to the construction of a boarding house for Romanian students,<sup>32</sup> and 110,000 crowns as expenses for the construction of a Central Orthodox Seminary, which was to be raised in Sibiu.<sup>33</sup> The aid given to the High School in Brad, which upgraded the existing middle school, was also condemned: “The fact that bare-foot boys attend high school should make us happy...,”<sup>34</sup> but the action was perceived as an intensification of the Romanian organization on all levels in the area. The lament of the signatory of the article becomes more and more acute, because during the debates of the ASTRA’s General Assembly in Sibiu, starting on Sunday, 13 October 1912, it seems that Vasile Stroescu was also present, but he had no contact with the Romanian leaders. However, the Hungarian press suspected him of being present at the demonstrations. He secretly participated, repeatedly, in the meetings of several Romanian associations, such as the assembly of the Petru Maior Student Association in August 1912.<sup>35</sup> During the debates in Sibiu, the Romanian elite was enthusiastic about Vasile Stroescu, the supporter of the cultural and economic aspirations of Transylvanian Romanians. On this occasion, we know that he donated 25,000 crowns to gather a collection of books destined for communities inhabited by Romanians.

In January 1913 this information was resumed and heightened with new details taken from the files of another general assembly of the Association held in October 1912. On this occasion, the newspaper made an imperative appeal to the authorities, arguing that promoting and raising the level of Romanian culture is only a pretext, because the real purpose of the association, although it did not explicitly recognize it, was similar to that of the Romanian National Party, namely, the unity of the Romanians.<sup>36</sup> By setting up branches in all localities inhabited by Romanians, the Association facilitated the operation of the cooperatives by orchestrating actions to “seize Hungarian lands”. Moreover, the author wrote, the policy of sustained economic development “will cause to a lamentable extent the life-giving Hungarian land to slip from under our feet.” The phrase appears twice in the pages of the Budapest newspaper. One of the main culprits is also named: Stroescu Vazul, through whose generosity inexhaustible financial resources had been provided, thus making possible this aspiration of the Romanians.<sup>37</sup> Next, the newspaper gave clear explanations about the consolidation of the Romanian capital so necessary to buy as much land as possible from the Hungarians, thereby expanding the boundaries of the Romanian villages. The action of setting up these cooperatives was, according to the Hungarian newspaper, well thought out, and even premeditated since the ASTRA’s general assembly in Blaj. The Bessarabian Stroescu had supported the Association with a sum of 50,000 crowns, which had already reached the treasury of the ASTRA, in order to initiate the first steps in this regard. This amount of money—informed the same newspaper—seemed to represent only a first tranche that the boyar donated, with others to follow. He had declared that if the cooperatives were successful and worked for the economic benefit of the Romanians, he was willing to provide much larger amounts of money. In this context, the bank director Vasile Osvadă from Orăștie was entrusted with a research study. For a considerable fee, he made a report on the cooperatives, excluding the Hungarian and German cooperatives, but not the Roma-

nian and Bukovinian ones, because “only these are the most suitable for his separatists claims.”<sup>38</sup> The ASTRA’s actions were also supported by the Romanian banks—according to the newspaper. As a result, the Association, through its economic policy, represented an incommensurable threat:

*On behalf of the ASTRA, there will be propagandists who will travel even to the smallest Romanian villages and will offer money, credit and land, and in addition they will stir the spirits against everything that is Hungarian.*<sup>39</sup>

Despite the fact that the regulation forbade any foreign membership in the Association, Vasile Stroescu seemed to be part of it, a fact that could not be proven, but the publication drew the attention of the Ministry of Interior in this regard.

The idea was not abandoned, but revisited in the pages of the *Pesti Hírlap* daily:

*The political and economic consolidation of the Romanians because of the ASTRA represents such a huge danger for Hungarians because of their infinite source of Romanian funds, thanks to the famous Stroescu Vazul . . . Also, we note that the association with such secret plans is led by Andrei Bârseanu. He is a man who does not speak Hungarian and receives two thousand crowns as state aid from the Ministry of Religion and Education because he teaches at the Romanian confessional secondary school in Brassó. The Hungarian government rewards such a person with two thousand crowns.*<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, the cooperationist propaganda was fueled by the much-mentioned and maligned Vasile Stroescu: “He also gave twenty-five thousand crowns to the ASTRA to set up popular village libraries within a year in the villages where Romanians live together with Hungarians or Saxons...”<sup>41</sup> All these philanthropic actions aimed at the Romanians in Transylvania were perceived by the Hungarian authorities as an affront to the Hungarian nation, and the danger stemmed from the development of the Romanian Transylvanian culture as if it were “already belonging to Romania.”<sup>42</sup>

Stroescu’s generosity is also classified as suspicious following the endowment of 135 confessional schools in Arad and Bihor.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, according to the daily newspaper *Pesti Hírlap*, Ioan Ignatie Papp, the bishop of Arad, responsible for the material, moral and patriotic aspects of the donations made to schools, should provide “reassuring” information on several issues. The Hungarian public would be curious to know the connection of the Romanian boyar Vasile Stroescu, a Russian subject, with the Hungarian culture, and for what purpose he supported 135 schools in Hungary, and why the Orthodox bishop considered that he was authorized to accept donations from a foreign citizen without the prior consent of the state authorities.<sup>44</sup>

At one point, the boyar’s entire patronage activity was questioned, and it was mentioned in the newspaper’s pages that no one knew him personally, that he had never visited anyone. Furthermore, the news reports regarding the donated amounts of money were not consistent; for example, some indicated the amount of 100,000 crowns, which was actually 10,000 crowns and even 1,000 crowns on another occasion.<sup>45</sup> In any case, the source concluded, the amounts donated until August 1912 were estimated to be



close to 1,000,000 crowns.<sup>46</sup> Estimating the fortune owned by the philanthropic boyar, the press considered that it reached a maximum of 5,000,000 crowns, insinuating that he would not be rich enough to make donations of 1,000,000 crowns in two years. Also, the very existence of Vasile Stroescu was disputed in a lengthy article. Allegedly, the political and cultural circles in Romania were in fact responsible for the money entering Transylvania for the Romanians living here. Also mentioned in this equation was the Albina Bank of Sibiu, which was said to be connected to a number of large banks in Romania in support of the Romanians in Transylvania. The concluding part emphasizes the idea that Stroescu's person was used only because they (the official circles in Romania) did not dare to take open action to avoid the intervention of the Hungarian government, thus disregarding the Apponyi Laws.<sup>47</sup> The Bessarabian boyar was even considered a "very skilled" Russian spy, whose estates, cattle and herds were just faily-tales, and "Romania's calculations can only be found in alliance with Russia."<sup>48</sup> This idea was not abandoned, being repeated in the pages of the same daily three months later:

*Stroescu again! This spy of Russia, who has made a great contribution, through the distribution of Russian rubles for cultural purposes, to the fact that both in Romania and in our country, Romanians suddenly became pro-Russian...<sup>49</sup>*

**A**FTER THE outbreak of World War I, the István Tisza government, suspecting that he intended to fuel a rebellion in Transylvania, declared the great patron a "public danger." His charitable activities had been interrupted since 1914. Under the heading "Interesting News About the Romanians," it was stated that the Department of Orthodox Printing and Publishing House in Arad had asked a Hungarian sculptor to provide priests and teachers in the diocese with 300 sculptures, representing some well-known Romanians. "These statues are representations of Romanian people who were the fiercest enemies of the Hungarians."<sup>50</sup> Among them was Vasile Stroescu.

Even later, Vasile Stroescu's persona remained a concern for the media in Budapest:

*Before the war, a wealthy landowner from Bessarabia, Stroescu, was constantly sending huge sums of money to Transylvania for Romanian cultural purposes . . . a street in Cluj bears his name today.<sup>51</sup>*

The philanthropic actions of the Bessarabian boyar Vasile Stroescu after he turned his attention to Transylvania were noticed from the very beginning, his donations being the subject of some news reports. Over time, however, as the boyar financed more and more schools, churches, and supported the ASTRA's activities, he was seen as a person capable of "stirring up" the spirits, so he was declared dangerous. His financial resources, considered "inexhaustible" by the Budapest press of that time, were perceived as a means to disrupt the country's stability.



## Notes

1. Vasile Stroescu (11 November 1845, Trinca, Khotin County–15 April 1926, Bucharest)—great Bessarabian landowner, one of the greatest philanthropists who promoted Romanian culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. He traveled to Bukovina, Maramureș, and Transylvania. See Mihai Sofronie, *Vasile Stroescu și românii transilvăneni: Referiri în periodicele din Transilvania* (Sibiu: Editura Universității “Lucian Blaga,” 2002); id., “Vasile Stroescu, un filantrop aproape uitat,” *Conferințele Bibliotecii Județene Astra Sibiu* 58 (2010): 11.
2. Andrei Popescu, *Elita Basarabiei la 1917–1918: Zece personalități care au făcut Unirea* (Bucharest: Minerva, 2018), 162.
3. Alexandru Ciulcu, “Din viața și activitatea lui Vasile Stroescu,” *Viața Basarabiei* (Chișinău) 9, 1 (1940): 7–10; Gheorghe Palade, *Integrarea Basarabiei în viața spirituală românească (1918–1940): Studii* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2010), 245.
4. In 1882 he donated 50,000 rubles to the Romanian government to support rural schools, and in four years he donated 50,000 francs for the needs of the ASTRA (Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People) in Sibiu. See Palade, 246.
5. Constantin I. Stan, *Minunata tăcere a unui boier basarabeian: Vasile Stroescu (1845–1926)* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1999), 8.
6. *Sfatul Țării* (Chișinău) 2,305 (15 May 1919): 1 (newspaper that came out first on 24 November 1917 in Bessarabia).
7. Onisifor Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții: În Basarabia revoluționară (1917–1918): Amintiri*, foreword by Iurie Colesnic, edition, preface, chronological table, notes, bibliography and index by Octavian O. Ghibu (Chișinău: Universitas, 1992), 51.
8. Sorina Paula Bolovan and Ioan Bolovan, “Vasile Stroescu dans la conscience publique de Transylvanie,” *Transylvanian Review* 11, 2 (2002): 26; Palade, 246.
9. Palade, 247.
10. *Tribuna* (Arad) 14, 129 (1910): 7.
11. Palade, 247, 252–259.
12. Popescu, 168–169.
13. Palade, 250.
14. Palade, 172, 249.
15. Sorin Farcaș, “Vasile Stroescu, un mecena al instituțiilor culturale românești,” in *In honorem Blaga Mihoc: Cultură, societate, biserică*, edited by Antonio Faur (Oradea: Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, 2013), 190; Ion Preasca, “Vasile Stroescu, boierul basarabeian care a fost primul președinte al Parlamentului României Mari,” *Adevărul*, 30 Nov. 2013, accessed 8 Oct. 2019, [https://adevarul.ro/moldova/actualitate/vasile-stroescu-boierul-basarabeian-fost-presedinte-parlamentului-romaniei-mari-1\\_529782d4c7b855ff564e5936/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/moldova/actualitate/vasile-stroescu-boierul-basarabeian-fost-presedinte-parlamentului-romaniei-mari-1_529782d4c7b855ff564e5936/index.html).
16. “Un om rar: Vasile Stroescu,” *Ziarul de duminică*, 2 Dec. 2003, accessed 8 Oct. 2019, <https://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/un-om-rar-vasile-stroescu-2968104/>.
17. “Vasile Stroescu,” *Foaia Diecezană* (Caransebeș) 41, 17 (25 April 1926): 1.

18. “Să onorăm personalitatea unui senator de Reghin, care de-a lungul vieții a donat milioane de taleri, ruble și florini pentru cauze nobile,” *Visele nu au termen-limită*, 13 Feb. 2019, accessed 8 Oct. 2019, <http://viselenuautermenlimita.ro/sa-onoram-personalitatea-unui-senator-de-reghin-care-de-a-lungul-vietii-a-donat-milioane-de-taleri-ruble-si-florini-pentru-cauze-nobile/#>.
19. The first issue was published in Budapest on 16 December 1903. It appeared regularly until 31 May 1925, with an interruption between 15 May and 27 September 1919. Although it declared itself an independent newspaper, it had liberal views. From 12 July 1925, it reappears under the new name of *Újság* until 23 March 1944.
20. *Az Újság* (Budapest) 8, 95 (1910): 11.
21. *Világ* (Budapest) 4, 192 (1913): 7. The daily appeared between 30 March 1910 and May 1925, and 14 May 1945–1949, respectively.
22. *Biserica și Școala* (Arad) 36, 28 (1912): 3.
23. *Pesti Napló* (Budapest) 64, 201 (1913): 11. The newspaper appeared between 9 March 1850 and October 1939.
24. *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest) 33, 174 (1913): 13. The daily had a conservative and nationalist orientation, being published between 1881 and 1938.
25. *Budapesti Hírlap* 33, 174 (1913): 13.
26. Moderate conservative newspaper published between 1878 and 1944 in Budapest.
27. *Pesti Hírlap* 32, 116 (1910): 14.
28. *Pesti Hírlap* 33, 177 (1911): 4.
29. *Pesti Hírlap* 33, 177 (1911): 4.
30. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 91 (1912): 34.
31. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 91 (1912): 34.
32. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 188 (1912): 10.
33. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 211 (1912): 8.
34. *Pesti Napló* 64, 193 (1913): 34.
35. *Az Újság* 10, 245 (1912): 11; *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 245 (1912): 14.
36. *Pesti Napló* 64, 5 (1913): 65.
37. *Pesti Napló* 64, 5 (1913): 65.
38. *Pesti Napló* 64, 5 (1913): 65.
39. *Pesti Napló* 64, 5 (1913): 66.
40. *Pesti Hírlap* 35, 216 (1913): 3.
41. *Pesti Hírlap* 35, 218 (1913): 10.
42. *Pesti Hírlap* 35, 218 (1913): 10.
43. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 109 (1912): 34.
44. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 109 (1912): 34.
45. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 137 (1912): 42.
46. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 199 (1912): 5.
47. *Pesti Hírlap* 34, 137 (1912): 42.
48. *Pesti Hírlap* 35, 171 (1913): 35.
49. *Pesti Hírlap* 35, 258 (1913): 36.
50. *Pesti Hírlap* 36, 87 (1914): 2.
51. *Pesti Hírlap* 47, 120 (1925): 8.

### **Abstract**

#### **The Philanthropy and Patriotism of a Forgotten Benefactor of Transylvania: Vasile Stroescu (1845–1926)**

The wealthy Bessarabian boyar Vasile Stroescu constantly supported with substantial sums of money the Romanian cultural institutions first in Bessarabia and Moldavia, and later in Transylvania. We mention here the special attention he paid to the *ASTRA* Association, founded in 1861 by the elite of the Romanian Transylvanian intellectuals. Building and managing schools, but also churches, was a priority for him. He considered education as an essential factor for the propagation and development of Romanian culture. Although he made an essential contribution through his donations to the preservation and consolidation of the Romanian language and culture, and he contributed directly to the realization of the Great Union of 1918, posterity rarely remembers him, and his name is mentioned all too rarely in both Romania and Bessarabia. His actions were mentioned in the Hungarian newspapers of the time, in the 1910s. Vasile Stroescu remained a constant concern for the media in Budapest, being perceived as an enemy set on to dismantle the country's stability. After the outbreak of World War I, the government of István Tisza, suspecting that he intended to foment a rebellion in Transylvania, declared him a "public danger."

### **Keywords**

Vasile Stroescu, benefactor, Transylvania, Romanian culture, Hungarian newspapers, "public danger"