
FINANCING OF CHURCHES FROM THE PUBLIC FINANCIAL FUNDS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

Cătălin Bulgariu *

'Petre Andrei' University, Faculty of Economics, no. 13, Ghica Vodă Street, Iasi, Romania

(Received 18 September 2012)

Abstract

The general preoccupations for spending the public financial funds under the conditions that in all the situations the resources are smaller than the needs, influence the opinions regarding the Church financing as well. Two categories are manifested: a category that supports the necessity of financing churches from the public funds and another category, which, recognizing the Church's role in the society, supports the state non-involvement in Church financing.

In this study, based on the data supplied by the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina, I formulated and provided arguments for my own opinions. The dominating idea is the one according to which the religious cults must be financed from public funds.

Comparing the financing manner of the religious cults from the period before 1989 with the one used in the post-communist period emphasizes the increased preoccupations of the decision bodies of the State and Church in identifying and using the financing sources. We also notice the existence of strong preoccupations of the Church for increasing their own incomes, especially from economic activities.

Keywords: budgetary allocations, financing of religious cults, incomes from economic activities, church-society relationship

1. Introduction

In the multitude of proposal ideas and arguments regarding the budget financing of the Church, more and more parishioners and specialists wonder what are however the possibilities and limits within which the public money can be used for financing this institution. The specialists are trying to select from the multitude of ideas those that, in their opinion, would have the highest acceptability degree. In our opinion, the spectre of positions is very large creating the paradoxical situation when those who bring arguments pro financing from the budget of the Church are criticized by others.

* E-mail: bulgariuc@xnet.ro

The category of those supporting the budget financing of the worship centres is rather heterogeneous. Some claim that for the religious cults, the budget financing should be total (Belgium , Luxembourg). Others are the adepts of introducing taxes for the Church, as applied in Switzerland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Others support the financing from the budget through the subvention of some of the activities specific to the Church, such as the social-charity ones (hospitals, infants' home, asylums for elderly people, ecclesiastical schools, religious assistance in prisons or military units, maintenance of historical monument churches).

The category of those who do not agree with the financing of churches from the budget claim that the parishioners must allocate the necessary funds for carrying out the specific activities. In countries such as France, Portugal, Great Britain, the Church is financed only from private sources, through donations, fees, collections and no allocations from the budget are provided.

The two categories (pro and against) are manifested with different intensities in Romania as well, where, the following three objectives are financed from the public funds [1]:

- building and renovating the churches,
- remunerating the priests,
- schools for the training of the clerical personnel.

2. Discussion

“The genesis of religion and its presence in the social consciousness were always related to different causes and purposes, but no matter how varied these opinions were distributed in history, it is impossible not to notice that the appearance of religion has facilitated the appearance of the first manifestations of self-conscience in thought, nor that afterwards, the religious consciousness substantially contributed, in the primitive societies and in the archaic societies, to the elaboration of Philosophy, art, literature, ethics and law.” [2]

The divergent opinions regarding the role of the Church are also manifested in the modern society and as a result in the issue of financing the religious cults.

In the ‘avalanche’ of pro and con ideas, we will not support one side or another, but we will try with the help of concrete data to present our point of view in relation with the analysed theme. The data used for obtaining the information necessary for formulating our opinions and arguments are those offered by the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina. The data refers to the sources of incomes and the destination of the main expenses in the period of 1989-2010. For the analyses we used the data from 1989 as being the last year of the communist regime, 2005 the year before the issuance of the law regulating the status of the religious cults in Romania (law 489/2006) and 2010 – the laws year with the budgetary execution accomplished.

In Table 1 are presented the data regarding the sources of incomes constitution at the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina during the period 1989-2010.

The dynamics of allocations from the state budget emphasizes the accentuated decrease tendency of their percentage in the total of incomes of the Metropolitan Church during the post-communist period from 24.2% in the year 1989, to 1.24% in the year 2005 and 2.94% in the year 2010.

Table 1. The dynamics of the financing sources of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina.

Indicators	Years		
	1989	2005	2010
Allocations from the state budget (%)	24.20	1.24	2.94
Allocations from the local budgets (%)	3.91	1.96	3.80
Own incomes (%)	66.13	69.08	69.44
Other sources (%)	5.76	27.71	23.81

Source: the budgetary execution at the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina during the period 1989-2010

The allocations from the local budget, as percentage in the total incomes, have decreased in 2005 from 3.91% in 1989 to 1.96%, but returned to 3.8 in 2010.

We must notice the significant percentage of own incomes in the total of incomes that is maintained in the period of 1989-2010 between 66.13% in 1989 and 69.44% in 2010.

The percentage of incomes from other sources has increased in comparison with the communist period, from 5.76% in 1989, to 27.7% in 2005 and to 23.8% in 2010. This is the expression of population's trust growth in the social, moral, cultural, psychological utility of the Church. It is also the result of the increase in the number of parishioners who, after 1989, enjoyed a much bigger freedom in manifesting their religious beliefs.

The growth of own incomes is the result of the increased preoccupations for the organization of the economic activities that provide incomes with whose help, the increase of the capacity in covering the special needs with funds is achieved. Thus, if in 1989, 16003 thousand lei were received (in current prices), in 2010 the amounts obtained were of 33650 thousands lei (in current prices). Figure 1 emphasizes the increase of the incomes percentage from the economic activities in the total of the Metropolitan Church's incomes.

From the analysis of the financing sources of personnel expenses it results that in 1989 the expenses were covered in totality from the state budget (Table 2). In the post-communist period, the percentage of personnel expenses paid from the state budget represented in 2005 and 2010 6.22% and respectively

6.76%. The reduction is the result of the legislative modifications that stipulate that only the priests should be paid from the state budget.

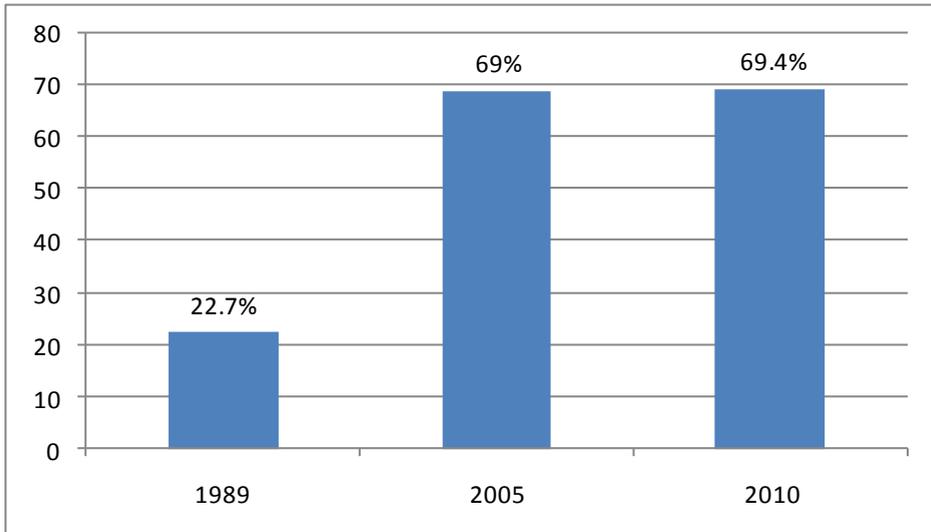


Figure 1. Evolution of the incomes percentage from economic activities in the total of the financing sources at the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina.

Table 2. Dynamics of the percentage of financing sources of the personnel expenses (1)

Indicators	Years		
	1989	2005	2010
Allocations from the state budget (%)	100	6.22	6.76
Allocations from the local budgets (%)	0	9.83	15.34
Own sources (%)	0	83.93	77.89

In the analysed period, there were modifications in the number and structure of the employed personnel, which determined modifications between the financing sources. For example, in 2010, the total number of employees was 502, of which 65 priests. Compared to 2005 when the number of employed persons was 506, of which 48 were priests, a decrease of the total number with 4 persons was registered, but the number of priests increased with 17. As a result, the percentage of salary expenses paid from the state budget increased, and the percentage of the retributions paid from the own sources was reduced.

From the local budgets, through the Metropolitan Church, the retributions of priests and of the auxiliary personnel who carry out their activity in the subordinated cult institutions are paid. These amounts are in direct connection

with the number of parishes that exist in the territorial area of coordination of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina.

Ionel Bostan emphasized the necessity of achieving a more realistic correlation of the expenses with their own incomes, and a more emphasized co-interest for developing the activities that produce incomes without affecting the quality of the activities specific to the religious act [3].

The data from the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and Bucovina confirm the aspects mentioned since in 2010, the financial year ended with a deficit of 228869 lei representing 0.47% from the registered incomes, which means the fact that between incomes and expenses there was a realistic correlation. This is also due to the increase of the interest for increasing the incomes from economic activities with 70% in 2010 compared to 2005.

3. Conclusions

The accomplishment of the complex role of the Church regarding the social, moral, psychological nature can only be achieved with the help of significant financial funds. We must not forget that in Romania, the Church is on the first place in the Gallup polls in which the population manifests its trust. This is where the necessity of the connection between Church, parishioners and public authorities, especially the local ones comes from. Regarding the latter, the issue of financing sources is raised.

The analysis carried out at the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina has led us to the following main conclusions:

- the percentage of the incomes from the budget in the total of incomes constituted is relatively small;
- the growing interest of the Church for increasing the incomes obtained from economic activities.

At country level, the budget financing of the Romanian state destined for building and renovating churches was continuously reduced in the last three years, from 54.6 million lei in 2010 to 10.5 million in 2012, which imposes the identification of new financing sources. One of the new sources could be attracting European funds. An example in this regard is represented by Golia Monastery which, with the help of structural funds, managed to rehabilitate the entire monastery assembly.

The general preoccupation of specialists regarding the Church financing takes into account, especially, the payment of the clerical personnel salaries, of the expenses regarding the religious education and the construction and renovation of churches, objectives comprised in Law 489/2006. We subscribe to the respective opinions because the Church opened new ways towards “constituting the initial forms of scientific research (Natural history, Cosmology, Astronomy, a rudiment of psychology, the physical theory of music, Linguistics) and scientific practice (medicine, zoology and botany, agriculture, metallurgy, mathematical calculation, architecture, history, geography). These attributions assumed at the beginnings of culture were only seldom recognized in religion”

[2]. These opinions have also influenced the issue of financing, creating controversial problems.

The public financing of the specific activities of religious cults, in our opinion, is necessary for increasing the Church role at this stage in which a series of behaviours that infringe on the Church precepts, are manifested. "Work has become de-monetised as a social norm and big gains no longer come from work; theft and speculation are encouraged under various ever subtle forms." [4]

Although there is a legal framework of preoccupations for its correct transpose into practice, however, in our opinion, it is necessary to extend the criteria for the attribution of funds in view of building and renovating the churches. We take into account especially the rigorous establishing of opportunities and necessities of the respective works.

In this work we have not referred at dimensions financing schools for the training of the clerical personnel because many other issues need to be considered requiring a separate treatment of the subject in a future paper.

Acknowledgement

This study benefited the financial support of the project 'Postdoctoral studies in Economics: Continuous training programme of the elite researchers – SPODE' co-financed from the European Social Fund, through the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013, contract no. POSDRU/89/1.5/S/61755..

We bring thanks to the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bucovina for providing relevant data, especially to IPS Teofan.

References

- [1] ***, Monitorul Oficial, part 1, **11** (2007) 2.
- [2] V. Kernbach, *Church in involution*, Editura Politica, Bucharest, 1984, 45.
- [3] I. Bostan, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **7(3)** (2011) 70
- [4] T. Brăilean, A. Ploeanu and S Chiper, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **8(1)** (2012) 100.