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**"JEWISH PATRIMONY OF ROMANIA –
REHABILITATION, RESTORATION AND
OPTIONS FOR PRESERVATION"**

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PART OF THE WORLD AND NATIONAL HERITAGE***
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Synagogue is "OUR Home Away from Home"

"Synagogue is "OUR OWN Special Place"

"Synagogue is the Holy Place for Jewish People"

"Synagogue helps us to connect with our tradition and our community"

Susan Van Dusen & Mark Benkson

FOREWORD

The cultural tradition of Romanian Jews has developed within the local cultural framework, thus becoming part of it. Jewish religious architecture of Romania reflects the eclectic character of the European Synagogal art in general: such as Austro-Hungarian, Slavic, Turkish and other influences, besides the local ones.

Subsequently, the expression means but more importantly its substance and value, render Jewish culture as part of local and universal cultural Heritage.

The Religious non tolerance and anti-Semitism have led at its peak, to the incommensurable human tragedy of the Holocaust, and implicitly have condemned Jews to isolation, as an act of self defense. But isolation does exacerbate the very reason that has determined it. Therefore it is the moral obligation and responsibility of Jews from all over the world to acknowledge, remember, preserve and to bring to public recognition their own history, in order to secure their present and future. As George Braque said "The future is the projection of the past conditioned by the present".

The importance of Jewish Sacred Patrimony owned by Jewish Communities of Romania, relies not only on the relatively large number of its components, but more on their outstanding historic, religious, architectural and artistic value.

One of the very reasons of FEDROM existence, and one of the main concerns of Fedrom leadership and of Fedrom professionals, is the preservation, conservation and maintenance of Jewish Sacred Patrimony and Heritage, consisting up to date, of 88 synagogues and 821 cemeteries, and other ritual buildings. Having stated the above, we should also mention our day by day confrontation with a multitude of wide spectrum issues, from the lack of financial funds to the vandalism against our cemeteries. Despite the financial hardship, starting from 2006, Fedrom had put to the fore the rehabilitation of Jewish Sacred Patrimony, as a priority program.

By doing so we hope to extend and reinforce the concept of integration of significant elements of Jewish Heritage, as objectives of spiritual pilgrimage, towards a process of recognition of the richness of Jewish cultural and religious tradition 'per se', and as part of the National and Universal Patrimony. Thus we will undertake the task of including some of already registered historic monuments of the Jewish Sacred Patrimony within the national and international touristic routes/circuits.

During our participation at "Jewish Heritage" Seminar in Bratislava (March 2009) we were glad to find out that our concerns and search are shared by our colleagues throughout the Jewish Communities of Europe.

The rehabilitation, the restoration and the conservation of Jewish Sacred Patrimony pose a complexity of religious ethical, moral, architectural-artistic and technical problems and represent an overwhelming financial burden. In the first place the ethical and moral dilemmas refer to the conservation of those synagogues which are still functioning as worship places, and of those synagogues that have lost their function as such (in principal due to lack of worshipers) and the priorities imposed by the state of physical degradation that could lead in many cases to collapse.

With respect to cemeteries, Fedrom are confronting with similar maintenance and conservation problems, certainly at a different scale, and especially with security issues in the wake of the recent acts of vandalism against Jewish cemeteries (i.e. Giurgiului – Bucharest, Botosani, Ploiesti, etc.).

Cemeteries are witnesses of Jewish life in places in which Jewish population is extinct or almost extinct. The way in which the individual cemeteries are embedded in the local cultural and historical context

clearly illustrates what it is that made Jewish life in the region so special. Thus enables us to rewrite the journey of Romanian Jewry moving on from a flourishing destiny to a complex and tragic fate. "Jewish cemeteries are often described as "the house of living" and "even when overgrown or abandoned the lives and life stories endure in sculpted form" (Ruth Ellen Gruber Foreword to "The Jewish Cemeteries of Bucovina" by Simon Geissbuhler). These are quiet places of rare beauty that reverberate loneliness and tragedy, that tell us in a glance, a story that transcends from the individual to a community and to a place. (photo #1,2)

FACTS AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRESERVATION AND MANTENANCE OF THE SACRED PATRIMONY

Before WW2 there were living in Greater Romania territory over 800,000 Jews. Until late 30-ies, for example, in Moldova and Bucovina Jews represented about one third, and at a time even half, of the total local population. The tragic events that took place during the Holocaust, and the mass emigration during the Communist regime, have drastically reduced the Jewish population, and now there are less than 10.000 Jews in Romania.

DATA ON CEMETERIES

There are 821 cemeteries in Romania, out of which 17 are Historic Monuments.

Area occupied by Jewish cemeteries is over 410 hectares, in more than 720 localities, and only in 148 of them there is a (small) Jewish Community.

Number of Jewish cemeteries, in localities where there is no Jewish population, exceeds 650 which makes it very difficult to administer.

A very difficult problem is to secure these objectives, because of the huge areas they cover and the excessive costs, which are impossible to be covered by Fedrom particularly nowadays when we are facing the rise of vandalism towards Jewish cemeteries (i.e. the Giurgiului Cemetery – October, 2008; Botosani and Ploiesti in 2009).

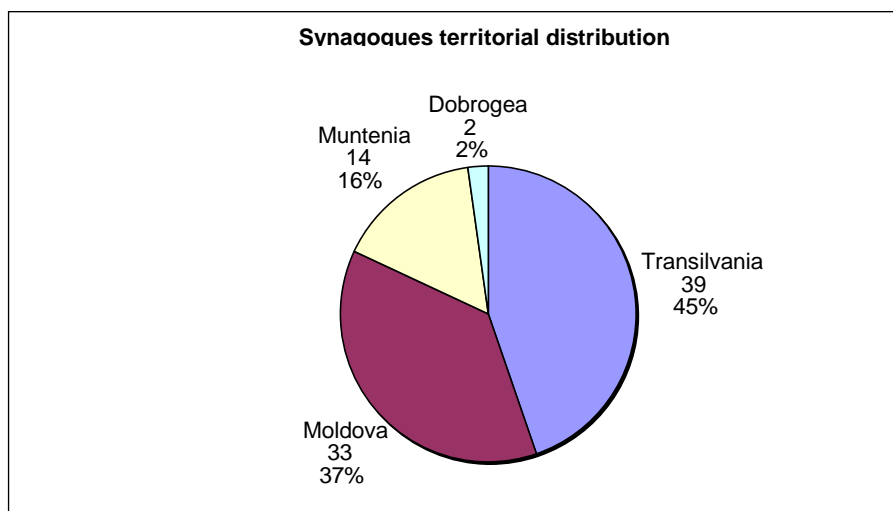
DATA ON SYNAGOGUES

Up to date there are in Romania 88 synagogues and only 43 are in use as such.

The distinctive value of the Sacred Jewish Patrimony derives from the fact that 34 are historical monuments.

The territorial distribution of the existing synagogues is a follows: 39 in Transylvania, 33 in Moldova, 14 in Muntenia, and 2 in Dobrogea.

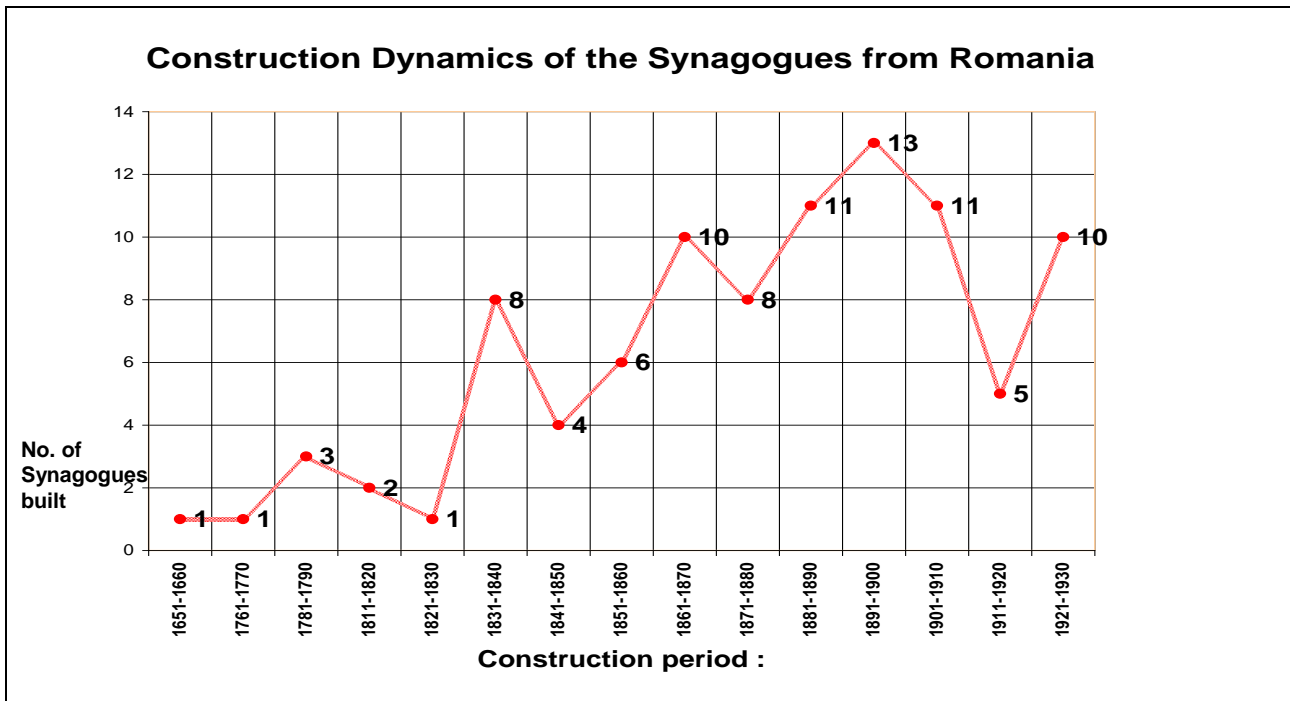
Chart no. 1



In chart no. 2 we show the dynamics of construction of the existing synagogues in Romania from the historical point of view. It is worth mentioning that in the 30-ies there were more than 100 synagogues in the city of Iasi only. No synagogues were built in Romanian territory after this date.

We leave the stage to the researchers and historians to comment and elaborate on these data.

Chart no. 2

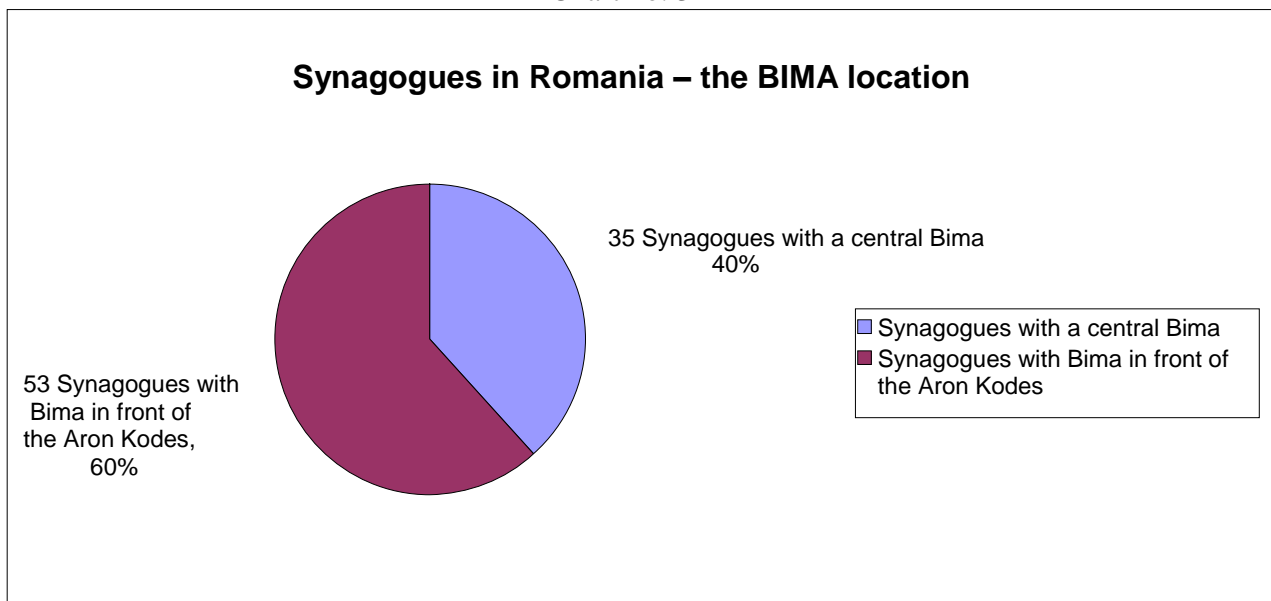


Here is the distribution of the existing synagogues, by their date of birth:

- 1651-1830 : 7 synagogues
- 1831-1860 : 15 synagogues
- 1861-1890 : 29 synagogues
- 1891-1900 : 12 synagogues
- 1901-1910 : 11 synagogues
- 1911-1930 : 14 synagogues

In Chart no. 3 we can see the distribution of the 88 Synagogues according to the “BIMA” (main stage) position within the main space, relatively to Aron Ha` Kodes.

Chart no. 3



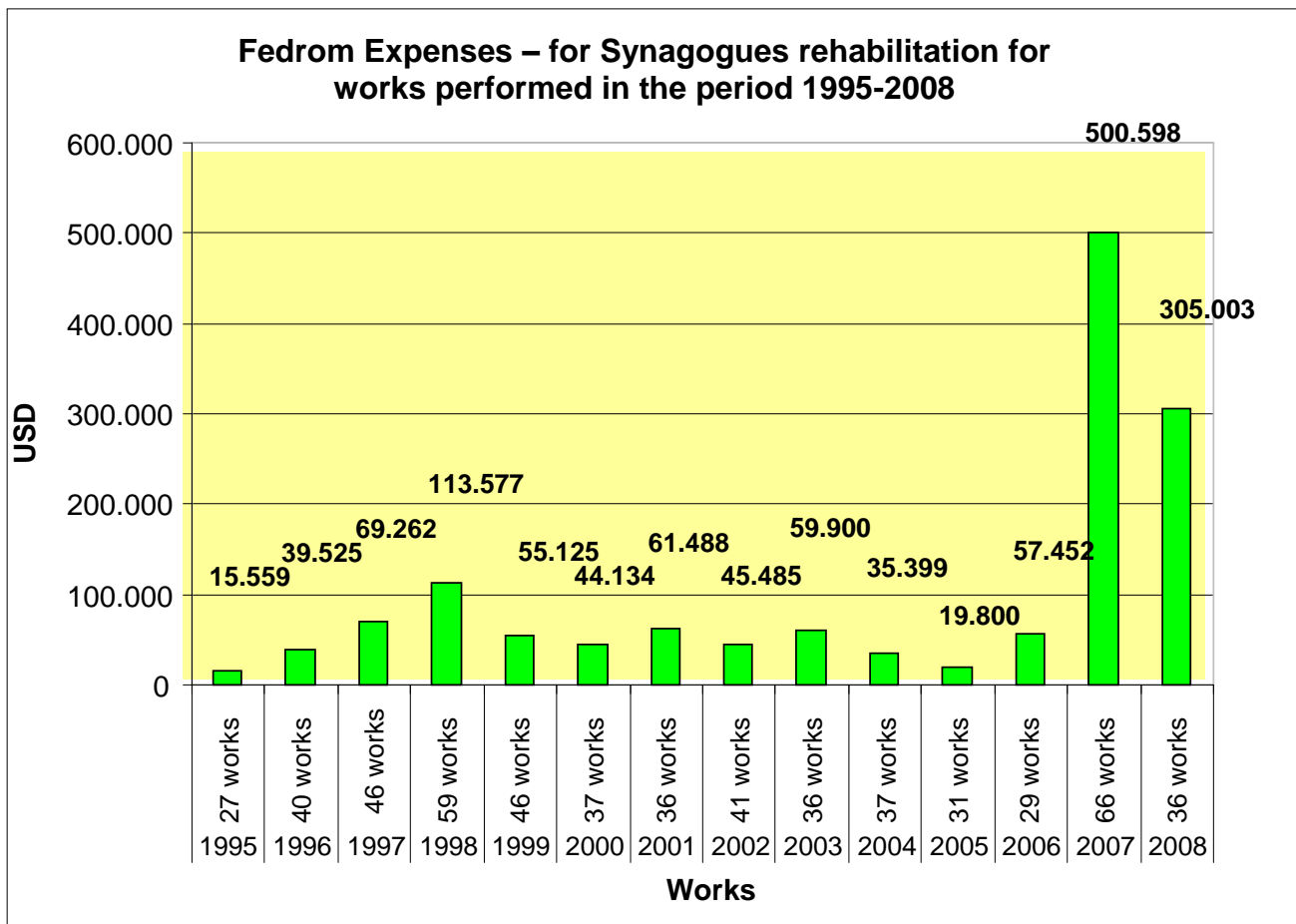
It should be mentioned that out of the 88 synagogues, there is only one wooden synagogue left, in Piatra Neamț that was erected in 1766 (according to State records on historical monuments). This type of Synagogue is specific to Jewish Religious architecture of Eastern Europe, particularly in the area of Moldova. Dimitrie Cantemir mentioned in his “Descriptio Moldavie”, the existence of a large number of such Jewish worship places.

PRESERVATION, RESTORATION, CONSERVATION DATA AND STRATEGY

The actual physical state of degradation of synagogues and cemeteries is on hand the reflection of the neglect, inadequate maintenance, and lack of financial resources during times of religious intolerance, and on the other hand is due to their age, obsolete structure, and longstanding exposure to earthquakes, looting, fire, etc. The results of all the above are cumulative, and show off much later (i.e. synagogues that could be soon in danger of collapse Buzău, Constanța, Câmpulung, Roman, Tulcea, Galați, etc.)

Fedrom leadership has put to the fore the preservation of the Sacred Patrimony and figures show that in 2006-2008 we invested almost 14 times more money than in the year 2001, as shown in Chart no. 4.

Chart no. 4

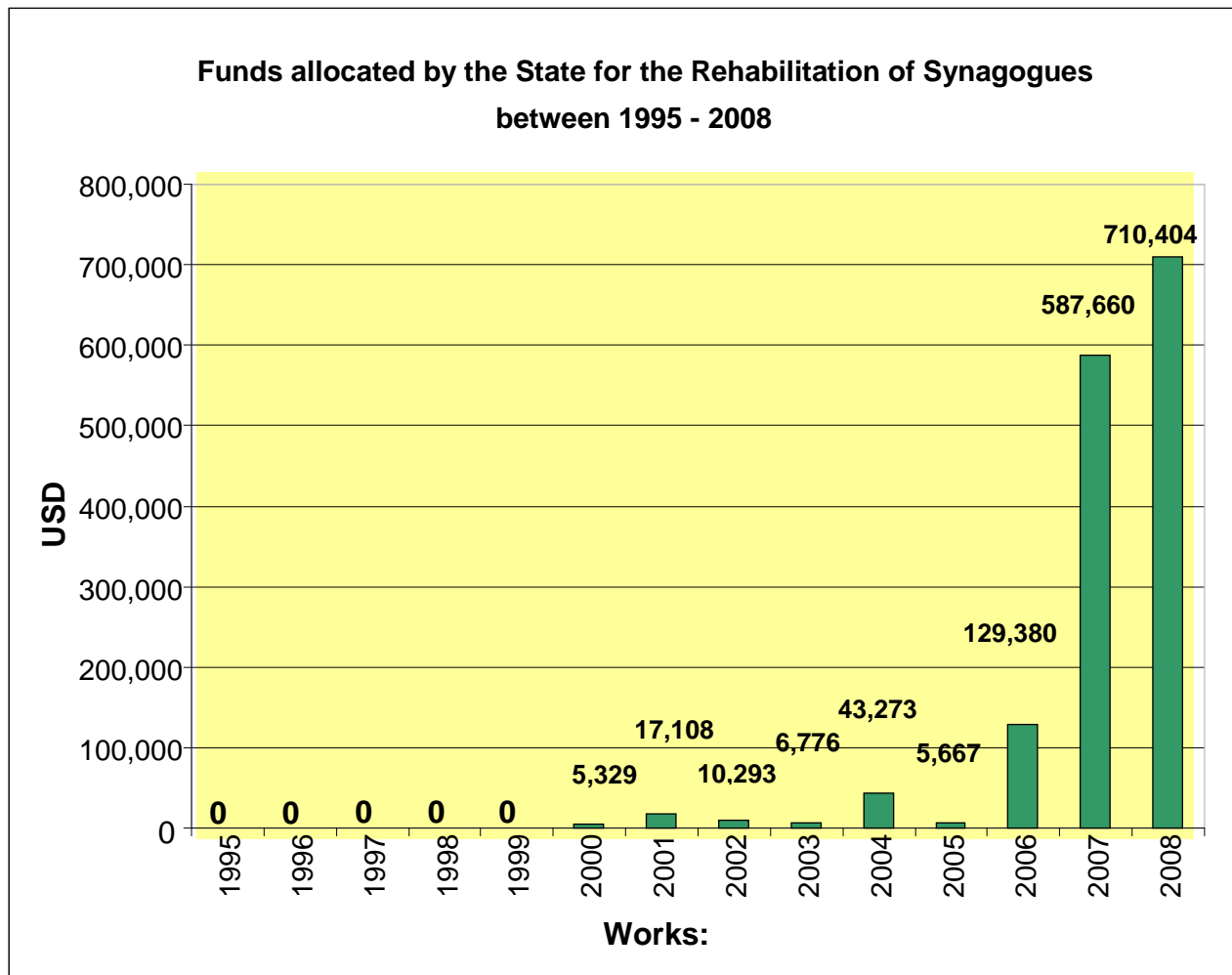


The Romanian State has allocated Funds for rehabilitation of Jewish Sacred Patrimony as follows:

- app. 17,100 US \$ in 2001
- app. 5,700 US \$ in 2005
- app. 587,700 US \$ in 2007
- app. 710,000 US \$ in 2008 (out of which app. 135,000 US\$ have been designated to a special program for the rehabilitation of Synagogues).

The dynamics of State funding, over the period starting from 1995 until present, is shown in detail in Chart no. 5:

Chart no. 5



All in all we spent in 2006-2007-2008 app. 2.3 million US dollars, for the rehabilitation of our Sacred Patrimony.

Taking 2007 as year of reference, that represents about 10 % of what we will need to invest in the future, in order to keep and to give the much-expected value to the existing sacred Jewish Patrimony.

There are two main strategic categories in view, for the rehabilitation of the existing synagogues: those that are still functioning as worship places (starting with the structural endangered ones), and the other of those synagogues that could not be used as worship places anymore.

Following we will refer to each category, with the description of the specific problems, priorities, and illustrated examples.

SYNAGOGUES THAT DID NOT LOOSE THEIR WORSHIP FUNCTION

With respect to the rehabilitation of Synagogues, except the ongoing funding issue, we encounter a diversity of problems such as: lack or incomplete historical documentation and expertise, the need for technical documentation that varies from case to case from structural and architectural expertise, consolidation project, restoration/rehabilitation project, the registration as Historic Monument, obtaining building permit, etc. These procedures are lengthy and costly and in most of the cases time and money are of essence, and the condition of the building imposes instant intervention.

Besides the above mentioned, the recurring difficulty in all such works is the hidden damage. Only the uncovering of the structural elements (after the beginning of the actual rehabilitation works) reveals the extent of the actual damage. Subsequently the consolidation project has to be reviewed and updated, and the budget will be heavily overloaded.

This was the case with Choral Temple consolidation and restoration. At the end of 2007 we started a major rehabilitation project of the largest Synagogue in the country, Choral Temple of Bucharest, the flagship of Jewish life of Bucharest and of Romania, a spiritual center for an active community of app. 3,000 of souls. A National Historic Landmark, Coral Temple was built between 1864 -1866. (photos # 3,4,5).

Other examples of synagogues that are currently under rehabilitation and/or consolidation works are: The Great Synagogue of Iasi (Historic Monument, built in 1657) (photos # 6,7), Meseriasilor Temple of Galatzi (built in 1875) (photos # 8,9).

Examples of recently rehabilitated synagogues are: the Great Synagogue of Bucharest (built in 1866), the Great Synagogue of Botosani (built in 1834), the Baal Shem Tov wooden Synagogue of Piatra Neamtz (Historic Monument, built in 1766).

Here are synagogues that are listed as first priority for rehabilitation: Synagogue of Tulcea (built in 1893), Leipziger Temple of Roman (built in 1881) (photos # 10,11), Havre Gah Temple of Campulung Moldovenesc (built in 1894), Sharei Tora Synagogue of Satu Mare (Historic Monument, built in 1889), Synagogue of Gherla (built in 1911), Synagogue of Vatra Dornei (built in 1902), Synagogue of Braila (built in 1862), Synagogue of Harlau (built in 1814), Synagogue of Brasov (built in 1924), Synagogue of Campina (built in 1904).

SYNAGOGUES THAT LOST THEIR WORSHIP FUNCTION

The main reason that almost half of our synagogues are not functioning as such, is one the following or both:

- Physical / structural deterioration that is life threatening, and demands urgent consolidation/rehabilitation but Fedrom **does not have immediate** financial means to do it (this is a problem we have with at least 10 synagogues throughout the country).
- The lack of worshipers in many locations.

We face the dilemma of how to resolve the situation. The rehabilitation length and costs are far to great for a building that is not in use. The former worship use is not possible anymore under the circumstances, and to keep it as it is will lead to collapse. On the other hand, to rehabilitate the asset, and after that to keep it locked will lead again to physical deterioration. There are two options left: one to get the synagogue deconsecrated (by the book) and permission for a different compatible use of the space, or to sell it. Sale is not an option: it is FedRom policy not to estrange or transfer the property of synagogues, for they are most valuable part of the Jewish Patrimony and Heritage. Moreover, the owner is free to do as he pleases with the property, and we do not want to see ten years from now, that a synagogue is demolished and a commercial building is built on the site.

Where applicable, Fedrom is proposing a “commodate contract” (a long term lending of the asset for no rent) for 10-50 years, and the use of the property with the commitment of the tenant to have the building redesigned and rehabilitated, within the provisions of the contract.

We at Fedrom have a number of such commodate contracts, for Synagogues in cities such as: Sighisoara, Bistrita, Medias, Orastie, Timisoara, Targoviste, with the stated purpose to have them renovated by the user, and to limit the use of the site for such cultural functions, that are compatible with the former religious use as worship place. The contracts stipulate the special designated function and also the activities that may take place within the limitations imposed by the former use. In these cases we request to put up at the street entry a plate stating that the edifice was a synagogue, the inauguration dates etc. the years of its actual functioning. We also request that the rehabilitation will keep the Jewish character of the building and in most of the cases we designate a room with separate entry (a chapel for our use) where the Aron Ha`Kodesh and /or specific Jewish worship objects are kept by us.

We believe this is a viable solution for the future of our unused synagogues, that will ensure the preserving of their Jewish history, and will also ensure that the buildings will be repaired and maintained with proper funds in long-term.

Further there are examples of former Synagogues that have been rehabilitated under a commodate contract and are being reused for various cultural functions/activities, as follows: Bistritza (Historic Monument, built in 1856) – current use: Concert Hall (for 20 years); Medias (built in 1896) – 3 years partnership agreement for rehabilitation with Eminescu Foundation; Orastie (Historic Monument, built in

1878) – current use: Cultural Center, 15 years Commodate Contract with the Municipality; Targoviste (Historic Monument, built in 1880) – current use: University space, 20 years Commodate Contract with the University of Targoviste; Timisoara-The Fortress (National Historic Monument, built in 1865) future use Concert Hall, 50 years Commodate Contract with The Philharmonic Society of Timisoara.

LAST WORD:

The future of Jewish Sacred Patrimony depends on many factors, and among most important of them, is the integration into the National and International Patrimony.

Another important factor is the need for documentation and data base. This should be realized by an extensive historic documentation and expertise as a multi-disciplinary professional effort and systematic inventory of the patrimony components, by periodic surveys and site visits and subsequent update of the physical condition of the assets. Ultimately all these should constitute a base for long term strategic decisions.

One fundamental strategic element is prioritization based on the analysis and synthesis of the above mentioned actions.

There is a need for a carefully elaborated financial program, having as corner stone the exploring of the possibilities to attract financial resources and assistance.

We should though take into account that the prospective involution of the Jewish population in Romania is not encouraging, and that could negatively influence the ability to attract those needed funds.

Though, our optimism is based on Fedrom commitment to continue to sustain the program of rehabilitation of the Sacred Patrimony.

Also there is a foreseeable, relatively intense flow of tourists to Romania, and a growing interest in religious objectives in general, particularly among youngsters, and we hope that young Jews of Romanian descendent (or else) living in Israel or in other parts of the world, will become interested in finding their traditional roots, and in discovering the Jewish Sacred Patrimony of Romania.

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