ANNEX no. 2

On the procedure for registering elements of the intangible cultural heritage in the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and for its updating

TECHNICAL SHEET
for the registration of the data of the element *The Tree of Saint Elijah* in the *List of living elements that make up the intangible cultural heritage existing on the territory of Romania*

A. Field/fields: Social practices, funeral rituals

B. Standard term: ***The Tree of Saint Elijah***

C. Local/regional names: *The Tree of Saint Elijah, sometimes The Branch of Saint Elijah*

D. Area of occurrence: The element is found in the communes of Tulucești and Frumușița, in the villages of Tulucești, Sivița, Tătarca, Ijdileni, Tămăoani, Stoicani, and Frumușița, in Galați County, taking place on July 19 and 20.

1. General information about the element: In these villages, on Saint Elijah's Day, there is the custom that the families of those who passed away during the previous year (since the last Saint Elijah's Day) give as alms at the cemetery a tree (a tree branch) decorated with clothes and household items, as well as food, fruits, sweets, and ritual bread (colaci). While in the past the alms were simpler, today the family of the deceased strives, in his or her memory, to offer everything necessary for a person (a man, if the deceased was a man; a woman, if the deceased was a woman). The custom was attested in the "Holidays and Customs" questionnaire, completed for the Romanian Ethnographic Atlas in 1976, by Germina Comanici, who noted that on Saint Elijah's Day "a tree was made with the belongings of the deceased, the mirror, a bottle of plum brandy (țuică). They were distributed at the grave."

People interviewed stated that the tradition is old, that this is how they found it practiced, and that their parents and grandparents used to commemorate the deceased in this way, in the first year, on Saint Elijah's Day. Between 1984–1986, Priest Ciobanu, who served for a long time in the village of Tulucești and later settled in Bucharest, told the ethnologist Alina Ioana Ciobănel about this custom, along with other information regarding annual traditions. On Saint Elijah's Day, as Mrs. A. I. Ciobănel recounted on July 18, 2025, this tree was given as alms. That priest, having some knowledge of ethnography, made the connection between the Tree of Saint Elijah and the trees given as alms in Northern Bucovina.

Among the annual traditions, the custom is part of the practices for the Ancestors' Day of Saint Elijah, "when the dead come to their homes and especially the children to their dwellings" (Pamfile, 1910: 211). In Covurlui and Tecuci, Pamfile also mentions the litanies, the offerings of fruits and small baked goods (bagels), and the shaking of trees by children specially invited into households "so that the dead may rejoice."

Ritual-ceremonial correspondences can also be made with the *the little fruit tree*s (*pomișorii/pomușorii)* from Northern Moldova, the tree of alms throughout Moldova and the Republic of Moldova, the „*pomul de grijit*„ and the „*pomana de viu"*, the „*târnosliv"* (wild plum tree) in the communal „*sărindar/sărindare"* performed during one's lifetime, the tree in Transylvania, the *bâta/bâtul mortului* (bat / dead man's bat) in Northern Gorj, the decorated branch with corn, apples, hemp tow, and a headscarf, the funeral apple, the memorial dance (*hora de pomană*) in Oltenia and in the Timok regions of Bulgaria and Serbia, etc. It may also correspond, in Moldova, to the "House in the Other World," an almsgiving custom performed at the completion of the 40-day period after burial.

The tree placed at the grave may be interpreted by ethnologists as the tree of life, the tree of Heaven, the almsgiving tree, the tree between worlds, etc. The tree also appears in other moments of the life cycle, at baptism or at wedding, its functional identification being "a ritual gift par excellence /.../ endowed, in traditional mentality, with the capacity to magically influence the bonds between people, as well as their future" (Văduva, 1997: 99).

Field observations::

The props, as observed in our research from the years 2022 and 2025, are the following: new clothes for women or men, depending on whether the deceased was female or male (suit, shirt, undershirt, shoes, socks, headscarf/hat, etc.); religious objects (icoană); household items (mirror, dustpan, broom, bucket, basin, flashlight, chair, blanket, soap, etc.); ritual bread (*colaci*) in various shapes and with specific names (ladder, dove, archangel, ends); food (fruits – apples, pears, grapes, bananas, oranges, etc.; various sweets; drinks; basil; etc.

The tree (in fact, a green branch with leaves) is planted at the grave, next to the funerary monument, with the objects offered as alms hung on it, placed there by the family. The priest goes, in turn, to each grave that has such trees (or has prepared the almsgiving of the tree, even if they have not actually made the tree, since there is no requirement from the priest to strictly observe the custom) and officiates the service, the "eftenia," for the almsgiving. Afterwards, the objects are taken from the tree and given to the person to whom they were promised (a person close to the deceased, a relative, or a poor person). In order for the offerings to be useful, beforehand the family goes to the shop together with the person who is to receive them, so that he or she may buy and choose the appropriate clothes. The tradition was that on the first Sunday, the one who received the alms would dress in those clothes and go to church, after informing the relatives of the deceased.

Nowadays, the ritual bread (*colaci*) is made in the bakeries of the communes of Frumușița and Tulucești, thus being integrated into their offer, as the ritual, the number, and the shapes are known. Colaci are ordered specifically for the tree.

The colac called "ladder" (*scară*) is placed at the base of the tree, representing a ladder that the soul must climb into the tree, which also bears the symbol of ascension.

The tree remains tied next to the cross, to provide shade, "as support for the deceased," and sometimes something is also left attached to it, such as a fruit or a pack of biscuits.

Since there is a large number of trees to be blessed, with "eftenii" memorial services also being performed for those who passed away many years ago—where only almsgiving is made at the grave without trees—and because

the days are very hot, the priests come to the cemetery early, at dawn, dividing the cemetery among themselves according to how many there are. In the village of Tulucești, as there are two cemeteries, the ritual is held on the eve of Saint Elijah's Day at the New Cemetery, and on the morning of Saint Elijah's Day at the Old Cemetery.

In 2025, visits were also made to the cemetery of the village of Frumușița, where two or three families prepared the almsgiving tree, while others only gave the alms of the tree without additionally decorating the branch. Compared to 2022, which followed the pandemic period when the custom was forbidden, a decline was observed: fewer families, especially those living in the village, set up the decorated branches. It was also noted that families who had moved to the cities, from Bucharest, Brăila, and Galați, came to carry out the custom of the Tree of Saint Elijah at the graves of their relatives.

Conclusions:

The tradition of the "Tree of Saint Elijah" is a local form of preserving the Ancestors' Day of Saint Elijah, as it was recorded at the beginning of the 20th century. It combines the fulfillment of individual deadlines established by the Eastern Church with the ancient feast from the cult of the dead, correlated with the vegetational cycle (it was also a dispensation for the consumption of fruits such as apples and summer pears).

More important and profound is the fact that, by involving the deceased in this feast even before the completion of 7 years, he or she is acknowledged much earlier as being integrated among the ancestors. This perspective is, in fact, the surprising and original element, since from the earliest centuries of Christianity people were convinced by the Christian Church that after death the soul undertakes a long and perilous journey and then is placed in an undefined space, awaiting individual judgment. For this period, the early Church not only accepted offerings but even recommended them as provisions. It described to the faithful the topography of a world in which, at some point, the thirsty soul needed water and rest. Here comes the meaning of the "untying of the spring" (carrying water for 40 days) and that of the tree of life which, as S. Fl. Marian says, "nourished man throughout his life with all kinds of fruits, just as the tree of Paradise once nourished Adam and Eve, and now, when man dies, it perishes together with him" (that is, a vegetal double of man, like the nuptial or the funerary fir tree).

Data collection and local involvement:

The research: the villages of Tulucești and Șivița, in Tulucești Commune. Photo and video materials illustrating the current phenomenon were collected, but Mr. Paul Buța from Șivița also holds an archive covering the last 10–12 years.

Research has taken place every year, being monitored in particular by Mr. Paul Buța, himself a local resident.

In 2022 and 2025, at the initiative of Mr. Paul Buța and with the support of the Tulucești Town Hall, researchers from across the country were invited to observe, study, and monitor the custom. Some of these researchers were, at the time of the fieldwork, members of the Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Romania.

The people who practice the custom are open and talk with the researchers, answering their questions.

2.a. Description of the keepers/bearers/creators of the element (age, profession, ethnic group)::

Being a custom occasioned by the death of a relative, people are faced with the phenomenon, the tradition, realizing the custom on the first feast of St. Elijah. This custom is known by the participation of people, in other years, in such commemorations. The tree is also made at the 40-day almsgiving, but also especially, on the day of St. Elijah, on the first feast after the person's death. If it happens that in the months of April or May a person dies, the tree is also put up at the 40-day almsgiving, and on the day of St. Elijah.

People have various professions, are of Romanian ethnicity, children, young people, mature and old, being from all social classes, locals or born in the village and settled in cities or relatives of the deceased, who come to the commemoration.

2.b. The contribution of institutions and non-governmental organizations to the inventory of the element:

- The Cultural Association for Romanian Traditions and Customs "VATRA," Șivița village, Tulucești Commune, organized, in partnership with LP1 Tulucești Commune, between July 18–20, 2025, a folkloric field research and a Cultural Symposium within the project "Promoting Intangible Heritage and National Culture in Romania and the Republic of Moldova" – KULtura,

ROMD00648, through the Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania–Republic of Moldova 2021–2027 Programme. Within this project, ethnologist researchers were invited to monitor the unfolding of the custom, each of them presenting, following their field observations, several ideas regarding what they had witnessed, as well as in the perspective of drafting the sheet of this element of intangible cultural heritage. The Cultural Symposium "Man, oh Tree!" (*Omule, pomule!*) took place at the Traditional Homestead "Vatra cu Dor" in Șivița village, Tulucești Commune, Galați County, on July 20, 2025. Responsible: Paul Buța – Cultural Specialist, tel. 0745082002.

- Tulucești Town Hall, 12 Primăriei Street, Tulucești Commune, Galați County, postal code 807300, tel./fax: +40 236 345 007 / +40 236 345 707, email: tulucesti@yahoo.com, Responsible: Adrian Buța – Project Manager.

- The Macedo-Romanian Cultural Society, an association of public utility, headquartered in Bucharest, 199 Vasile Lascăr Street, tel. +40 213116618, through its Secretary General, Dr. Emil Țîrcomnicu, was interested in the unfolding of this custom, observing its performance both in 2022 and in 2025, and supporting its registration in the *List of living elements of intangible cultural heritage*.

3.a. The current status of the element and identification of any risks of its disappearance or significant modification:

The custom is encouraged and accepted by the Church, with priests participating in the commemoration and blessing of the objects, together with the families of the deceased as well as the entire community. The mayors of the communes of Tulucești and Frumușița also take part and support the proper unfolding of the commemorations in the village cemeteries, considering this custom to be part of the community's identity.
Risks: abandoning, out of convenience, the decoration of the tree. It has been observed in several cemeteries that people prepare and, with the help of the priest, perform the custom, but no longer make the tree itself. However, the almsgiving still bears the name "Tree of Saint Elijah." To show that the custom had not been forgotten, in our presence, a woman broke off a branch, planted it in the ground, and placed in it various items prepared for the alms, explaining that out of convenience she had not intended to make the tree. Raising awareness about fully performing the custom and recognizing that it is part of their cultural and identity heritage can lead to its preservation. Another risk may be

represented by organizing the custom with more expensive items, harder to procure by ordinary people, for the sake of "family pride," aspects which should not be encouraged.

3.b. Plan to safeguard the element, through specific actions:

The custom is preserved in situ, without major intervention by authorities, the church, researchers, etc. It is imprinted in the consciousness of the people who perform it, at difficult times caused by the disappearance of a close relative. It is similar to another element introduced in the *National Inventory of Living Elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the "Alms Hour"(Hora de pomana) from Oltenia. By including it in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, people will be encouraged to preserve the custom, making them aware of its cultural and spiritual value, without giving up certain sequences due to convenience or considering the custom obsolete.

Further research will be carried out to popularize it and monitor its development, explaining its value to representatives of local authorities, as well as priests who are involved among the faithful.

It can be introduced, further, to monitor its development and research, in cultural projects carried out in these villages.

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5.a. Coordination team for the inventory of the element:

Dr. Emil Țîrcomnicu, First-degree researcher at the „Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore.

Paul Buța, Cultural specialist A.C.T.O.R. „VATRA".

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Eugen Țepeș-Stroia, Museographer at the "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum

5.b. Responsible for monitoring and updating the data about the element:

At the initiative of Mr. Paul Buța, a group was formed for the preparation of the inventory sheet and for its monitoring, the group being open also to other researchers who wish to join in the research and scientific promotion of this element.

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6. Date of completion of the inventory sheet: August 20, 2025