

HISTORICAL TESTIMONIES

FIVE LETTERS TO STALIN

FROM BESSARABIA

Famine, "Dekulakization," and Deportation
in Soviet Moldavia, 1947-1952

Mariana S. Țăranu

Compiler, author of the introduction and commentaries

English editorial version for author review

Sibiu, 2026

Five Letters to Stalin from Bessarabia

Famine, "Dekulakization," and Deportation in Soviet Moldavia, 1947-1952

Compiler, author of the introduction and historical commentaries:
Mariana S. Țăranu

Status of this version

This English-language editorial version has been prepared for author review. The letters were translated from the present Russian editorial version, which was itself based on the Romanian text published in 2014. Because most of the documents were originally written in Russian, the English text should be checked against the archival originals before any academic publication. This layout should not be cited as a diplomatic transcription of the originals.

Basis of the edition

Țăranu, Mariana S. (ed.). *Scrisori către Stalin sau spovedaniile celor ocupați (1947-1953)*. Chișinău: Pontos, 2014. 520 pp. ISBN 978-9975-51-601-3.

The complete edition contains 280 letters from the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, arranged chronologically and accompanied by explanatory notes.

Contents

About the Author and the Project

Why Did People Write to Stalin?

A Brief Chronology, 1946-1953

1. Hunger Compels Them to Speak: Teachers from Soroca, 1947

2. A Blind Old Man Branded a "Kulak": Gheorghe Streci, 1949

3. The Fourth Plea Before Deportation: Filip Talpă, 1949

4. Two Sons Died in the War; Their Father Was Exiled: Gheorghe Păduraru, 1950

5. "I Kiss You Many, Many Times": Daria Herghelegiu, 1952

What These Five Letters Reveal

The Complete Edition and Recommended Citation

Appendix: Draft Open-Access Blog Page

Editorial principle

The focus of this brochure is not Stalin or Soviet symbolism, but the people who wrote to him: their language, hopes, fears, and fates. Each document is accompanied by context and a concise commentary so that the letter does not become a sensation detached from its historical setting.

About the Author and the Project

Mariana S. Țăranu is a historian, PhD in History, associate professor, and researcher of archival heritage and the social history of Soviet Moldavia. Her principal fields of research are Stalinist repression, the famine of 1946-1947, deportations, collectivization, relations between state and society, and the everyday experience of people living under a totalitarian system.

Her book *Scrisori către Stalin sau spovedaniile celor ocupați (1947-1953)* was published by Pontos in Chișinău in 2014. This documentary edition contains 280 letters identified in the holdings of the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova. Peasants, teachers, workers, elderly people, widows, children, and deported families wrote about famine, taxes, confiscations, inclusion on "kulak" lists, collectivization, and deportation.

Mariana S. Țăranu now lives and works in Sibiu, Romania. She continues to research the history of Soviet Moldavia and Eastern Europe and publishes historical materials for Romanian and international audiences.

The purpose of this short brochure is to restore a human voice to individual letters and to show how ordinary people tried to speak to a regime that determined their property, freedom, place of residence, and sometimes their very possibility of survival.

Mariana S. Țăranu | marianataranu.eu

Why Did People Write to Stalin?

Between 1947 and 1953, residents of the Moldavian SSR appealed to Joseph Stalin when every authority closer to home had failed them. They wrote in the aftermath of famine, during accelerated collectivization, under the pressure of heavy taxation, property confiscation, and mass deportations. For many, a letter to Moscow was the last hope of reversing a decision made by a village soviet, a district executive committee, or a republican authority.

This correspondence reveals one of the central paradoxes of the Stalinist system. People sought justice from the head of a state whose policies had created the very mechanism of their powerlessness. Gratitude to Soviet power appears beside descriptions of hunger; loyalty to the state beside requests for the return of a confiscated home; praise for Stalin beside testimony about the actions of his apparatus.

Stalin was called "father," "teacher," "great leader," and "someone close to us." Such formulas cannot be read solely as sincere admiration. They belonged to the language of the period: a language of self-protection and, at the same time, a product of the personality cult. Before describing how Soviet power had deprived them of the means to live, letter writers first had to establish their loyalty.

The letters were registered by a special office in Moscow, forwarded to the Council of Ministers in Chişinău, and then sent to district executive committees and village soviets. A complaint was therefore often returned for investigation to the very local officials against whom it had been lodged. When no result followed, people wrote again - a second, third, or fourth time.

Corpus and Selection

The complete edition contains 280 letters sent between 1947 and 1953 from the Moldavian SSR and from regions of deportation. Their authors belonged to different ethnic and social groups; the youngest were about thirteen years old, the oldest over eighty. Most letters were written in Russian because they were addressed to the central authorities in Moscow.

Five documents have been selected for this brochure. They do not constitute a statistical sample. Each letter illuminates a distinct mechanism: famine and the unequal distribution of food; the arbitrary use of the label "kulak"; repeated appeals that produced no result; deportation despite demonstrable loyalty; and confiscation together with the inherited stigma borne by the family of a deportee.

Important note on the English text

The 2014 edition contains Romanian translations of the letters. The present English text follows the Russian editorial version prepared from those translations and is intended primarily for reviewing the structure, tone, and commentaries. In the final scholarly version, every letter should be checked against the original held by the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova.

A Brief Chronology, 1946-1953

Year	Event
1946	Against a background of postwar devastation and crop failure, state procurements and food seizures sharply deepened the crisis. Mass famine began.
1947	The famine reached catastrophic proportions. In March, the first of the five letters in this brochure was written: a collective appeal by teachers from Soroca.
1948	Lists of households classified as "kulak" were expanded; higher taxes and additional deliveries to the state were imposed.
1949	Collectivization accelerated. On the night of 5-6 July, families categorized as "kulaks" and other "unreliable elements" were deported en masse.
1950	Deportees in Altai Krai and in Kurgan and Tyumen Oblasts continued to petition for permission to return home.
1951	A new wave of deportations on the night of 31 March-1 April targeted families persecuted, among other reasons, for their religious affiliation.
1952	Letters continued to document confiscations, refusals of admission to collective farms, poverty, and years spent awaiting an answer.
1953	The last letter in the complete edition was registered on 26 January. Stalin died on 5 March; the appeals addressed to him remained records of a dialogue that never took place.

LETTER 1

Hunger Compels Them to Speak

Teachers from Soroca, 19 March 1947

Historical context

The letter was signed by Ignatieva, Pronin, and Lebedeva. The authors belonged to a category of salaried employees whom the state was formally required to supply with food. Yet the provisions did not reach them. Their appeal combines gratitude to Stalin, a description of hunger, and accusations of abuse against local trade officials.

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich!
[written on 19 March 1947]

Forgive us, but we turn to you as to a father. We survived the war, and we remain grateful, but our strength is failing us. We feel awkward and ashamed; we know that you have many concerns even without ours, but believe us: hunger compels us. Employees with many children walk about like shadows. There is enough bread for only half the month, and for the rest of it our children eat oilseed cake. We have sold everything we owned and go about in rags and tatters.

We thank you, Joseph Vissarionovich, for caring for us teachers and for providing us with food, but unfortunately it does not reach us. What good are galoshes, cloth, and other goods to teachers if the head of the trade department will not even let us come near them, while the school director is dressed to perfection? It is unpleasant to report this, but the situation locally is disgraceful. Malin, the deputy head of the trade department, sells hundreds of metres of cloth at the market, while a teacher no longer even looks like a teacher. Can teachers set an example to their pupils when dressed in worn-out clothes? Whenever an inspection takes place, everything somehow appears to be in order.

As we once waited for the war to end, so now we eagerly await the harvest. But at present, Joseph Vissarionovich, life is very difficult for us.

Forgive us for troubling you with our problems. We shall overcome the difficulties, but we can no longer endure injustice. We cannot afford bread sold at commercial prices, while traders sell it for 150 rubles a loaf. How are we to survive on a salary of 500 rubles a month? If only the new harvest would ripen sooner!

Forgive us, Joseph Vissarionovich. We have turned to you as to someone close to us.

Teachers: Ignatieva, Pronin, Lebedeva.

Archival reference as cited in the 2014 edition: National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, fonds 2848, inv. 7, file 1, fol. 488. Published in: Mariana S. Țăranu (ed.), *Scrisori către Stalin...*, pp. 57-58.

Historian's commentary

The document shows that famine affected not only rural households but also urban salaried employees. The authors neither reject Soviet power nor accuse Stalin directly. Instead, they distinguish the caring leader from abusive local officials. This construction - the "just centre" versus the "unjust executors" - allowed them to describe catastrophe without turning the letter into open political protest.

Translation note: the Romanian word "macuc" has been rendered as "oilseed cake." The term should be checked against the Russian original before final publication.

LETTER 44

A Blind Old Man Branded a "Kulak"

Gheorghe Streci, Cahul, 16 February 1949

Historical context

Gheorghe Streci was sixty-eight years old and blind; his sixty-six-year-old wife was also unable to work. Their household was classified as "kulak" because, while his small vineyard was ripening, he hired a watchman to guard it. This was already his third appeal.

To the Chairman of the Cahul City Soviet, Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR,
Comrade Damaskin.
Copy to: Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Comrade Joseph Vissarionovich
Stalin.
From citizen Gheorghe N. Streci, Cahul.
[registered on 22 February 1949]

For the third time, I appeal to be exempted from the taxes that I am required to pay as a "kulak" household, yet my request has still not been granted. I am old and blind; I am sixty-eight, and my wife is sixty-six. There is no able-bodied person in our household. I own half of a house, 2.5 hectares of arable land, and 0.5 hectares of vineyard. I have neither livestock nor implements. I am unable to pay the taxes.

In 1947 I was placed in the category of "kulak" households on the grounds that I had used hired labour. In 1945, 1946, and 1947, from August to November, I employed a watchman in the vineyard while the grapes were ripening because I was blind and could not guard the crop. I do not consider this to be the use of hired labour.

There is now nothing left in my household because in 1947-1948 I was forced to sell everything in order to pay the taxes.

In 1949 I must again pay taxes as a "kulak" household, but I have neither livestock nor grain.

I ask you, Comrade Damaskin, to convene a commission to assess my household and property, because I have been left with nothing.

I earnestly ask you to investigate and to stop classifying me as a "kulak," because in my old age I have neither the strength nor the means to pay such a tax. Please do not refuse my request.

16 February 1949.

Archival reference as cited in the 2014 edition: National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, fonds 2848, inv. 7, file 77, fol. 166. Published in: Mariana S. Țăranu (ed.), *Scrisori către Stalin...*, pp. 118-119.

Historian's commentary

Here the label "kulak" functions not as an accurate description of economic status but as an administrative instrument. The necessity of hiring a watchman because of blindness was interpreted as exploitation of another person's labour. Higher taxation then destroyed the household itself: the old man sold his property to pay the taxes, yet he continued to be classified as a "kulak."

LETTER 53

The Fourth Plea Before Deportation

Filip Talpă, Răspopeni, 17 March 1949

Historical context

Filip Talpă was writing to Stalin for the fourth time. He was sixty-six years old and his wife fifty-eight; both were ill and unable to work. One of the family's outbuildings was being used as a kindergarten without rent being paid. Despite repeated petitions to remove the household from the "kulak" list, on the night of 5-6 July 1949 Filip Talpă, his wife Pelaghia, their daughter Efimia, and their son Ion were deported to Kurgan Oblast.

To the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Comrade I. V. Stalin.
From the peasant Filip F. Talpă, village of Răspopeni, Moldavian SSR.
[registered on 21 March 1949]

Fourth plea

I send my fourth plea to our All-Merciful Teacher, the father of the Soviet people, and our most precious mentor, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin!

I, Talpă F. F., write to you with a trembling hand and implore you, Most Merciful One, to remove me from the list of "kulaks." Of course, when I was young, I tried throughout my life to work as much as possible in order to earn my bread! Now, when I am close to death, I have earned the title of "kulak." It is absurd, yet our children too are called "kulaks." Because we can no longer work, we have been classified as Group II invalids, and in our old age we live only by following the treatments prescribed by doctors to sustain our health. I am sixty-six; my old wife is fifty-eight.

We have fulfilled the state delivery quotas; the collective farm did not accept our land. We have a house and a shed that is being used unlawfully as a kindergarten - without rent and without any payment. They will not admit us to the collective farm. Because of old age and illness, we await only death and the grave!

Persistently and ardently we ask you, our father, Leader of the Soviet People, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, to remove me from the list of "kulaks"!

We eagerly await a favorable resolution at the following address: Moldavian SSR, Râspopeni District, village of Râspopeni.

Petitioner: Talpă F. F.
17 March 1949.

Archival reference as cited in the 2014 edition: National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, fonds 2848, inv. 7, file 80, fol. 284. Published in: Mariana S. Țăranu (ed.), *Scrisori către Stalin...*, pp. 130-131.

Historian's commentary

Four appeals did not protect the family from deportation. The language of the letter is especially revealing: a man facing ruin calls Stalin "father," "teacher," and "all-merciful." This language does not negate his despair; it reveals the limits of permissible speech. To plead for rescue, the author first had to affirm devotion to the symbolic father of the state.

LETTER 216

Two Sons Died in the War; Their Father Was Exiled

Gheorghe Păduraru, Altai Krai, 7 September 1950

Historical context

Gheorghe Păduraru came from the village of Țiganca in the Cahul area. He stated that he had been the first to join the collective farm and had turned over his farm implements and a pair of oxen. After the chairman of the village soviet was replaced, Păduraru was expelled from the collective farm and placed on the "kulak" list. Even a decision ordering his removal from that list did not prevent his deportation on 6 July 1949.

To the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Moscow.
From citizen Gheorghe K. Păduraru, Biysk State Farm, Altai Krai.
[registered on 18 September 1950]

I ask that my statement be investigated.

I, the undersigned Gheorghe K. Păduraru, was born in 1882 in the Moldavian SSR, Cahul County, Baimaclia District, village of Țiganca, and come from a poor peasant family. From childhood until 1947, I lived in the place where I was born and worked the land. In 1947 a collective farm was organized in our village. I was the first to join it and handed over all my agricultural implements and a pair of oxen.

I worked in the collective farm until 1948, when the chairman of the village soviet was replaced. I was expelled without any reason. They claimed that I had been a "kulak" and had employed hired workers for four years. In reality, I was not a "kulak" and never employed hired workers. I immediately complained to the Council of Ministers of the Moldavian SSR in Chișinău. A representative was sent from there to investigate the matter locally.

Soon afterwards, letter no. 08-PK of 13 May 1949 reached the Baimaclia District Executive Committee, stating that I was to be removed from the "kulak" list and reinstated in the collective farm.

When drawing up the list of "kulaks," the chairman of the village soviet, Comrade Pretula, entered my name instead of that of the real "kulak," Spiridon G. Arnăuțanu. Although I was the member of a fallen soldier's family, on 6 July I was deported to the place where I still live today.

Two of my sons died in the Great Patriotic War: one in Hungary, the other in Germany. My son-in-law also died in the war, and my daughter died as well. My three remaining children lived with me until 1949. When I was deported, they were left without anyone to look after them. Now, in my old age, I am forced to wander and suffer because of the village soviet chairman's false testimony.

I earnestly ask you to consider my statement and allow me to return to my homeland, to the Moldavian SSR and my family, so that I may be a free and honest citizen of the USSR. I ask that my request be granted.

Petitioner: Gheorghe Păduraru.
7 September 1950.

Archival reference as cited in the 2014 edition: National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, fonds 2848, inv. 7, file 131, fols. 160-160v. Published in: Mariana S. Țăranu (ed.), *Scrisori către Stalin...*, pp. 383-384.

Historian's commentary

Sacrifice in wartime and formal loyalty offered no guarantee of safety. The author joined the collective farm voluntarily, obtained a ruling in his favor, and lost two sons and a son-in-law in the war - yet he was still deported. A repressive category proved stronger than facts, investigations, or merit.

LETTER 276

"I Kiss You Many, Many Times"

Daria Herghelegiu, Ghiliceni, 4 August 1952

Historical context

Daria Herghelegiu married in 1948. In 1949 her husband's family was placed on the "kulak" list; her mother-in-law and four girls were deported, and the house and property were confiscated. Daria's husband died in May 1952. She was left alone with two small children while continuing to work on the collective farm. The letter is especially important for understanding the intimate language of the Stalin cult.

To Generalissimo Comrade I. V. Stalin, Moscow.
From citizen Daria I. Herghelegiu, village of Ghiliceni, Chişcăreni District.
[registered on 8 August 1952]

I ask you to consider my complaint, in which I shall explain the following. I, citizen Daria I. Herghelegiu, married in 1948, and by 1949 we had already been classified as "kulaks." This is unlawful: how could I become a "kulak" in a single year? My husband's mother was classified as a "kulak" and deported, which was also unlawful. My husband was a widower with two daughters, and I had two little girls.

At the time I had given birth and was staying with my mother; my husband was also there. His mother was then deported together with four girls. Everything was removed from the house, the house was locked, and we were not allowed to enter. They took our home and gave us a state-owned apartment, and now they are evicting us from that apartment as well. How am I to live with two children? My husband died on 25 May 1952 at seven in the morning, and I was left alone with two children.

The elder is three years old; the younger is one year and four months old.

I wrote to the minister in Chişinău and received an answer stating that the house must be returned because they had no right to take it, but the house was not returned to me. I was told: if my husband's mother was deported, then I am a "kulak." But what kind of "kulak" am I when I have nothing to eat? They wrote from Chişinău instructing me to appeal to Bălţi, and I did. A reply came from Bălţi stating that the house must be returned, but they do not want to return it, and so I decided to write to you. My house is not worth even 300 rubles, but they took it and say they will not return it because my husband's mother was deported.

I beg you to accept my complaint. For two years I have worked on the Andreev Collective Farm in the village of Ghiliceni, Chişcăreni District. I work there without a formal application.

For now, goodbye. I kiss you many, many times. I shake your hand firmly.

Please accept my complaint, dear and beloved teacher, Comrade Stalin.

Signature.
4 August 1952.

Archival reference as cited in the 2014 edition: National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, fonds 2848, inv. 7, file 236, fol. 198. Published in: Mariana S. Țăranu (ed.), *Scrisori către Stalin...*, pp. 472-473.

Historian's commentary

The ending is striking for the disjunction between the violence endured and the language of affection. Addressing Stalin as a beloved teacher shows how deeply the leader's official image had entered private language. The document also reveals inherited stigma: the woman was declared a "kulak" not because of her own household but because her mother-in-law had been deported. Work on the collective farm provided neither rights nor protection, nor even a guarantee of shelter.

What These Five Letters Reveal

The five documents expose different sides of a single system. Hungry teachers believe that Stalin is unaware of abuses. A blind old man tries to prove that hiring a watchman out of necessity does not make him an exploiter. Filip Talpă writes four times, yet he and his family end up in Kurgan Oblast. Neither joining the collective farm, nor an official investigation, nor the death of his sons in the war saves Gheorghe Păduraru. Daria Hergheliegiu asks for the return of a modest house and concludes her complaint with words of love addressed to the man who embodied the state.

Their letters cannot be reduced either to loyalty alone or to resistance alone. They are attempts to survive within an imposed language. The writers use official formulas, list their merits, emphasize their poor origins and loyalty to the state, yet at the same time record famine, confiscation, arbitrary rule, the non-enforcement of official decisions, and the disintegration of families.

Letters to Stalin are therefore more than sources for the history of repression. They show how individuals learned to speak to totalitarian power: what they could name, what they had to leave unsaid, and the price they paid for the right to be heard.

The Complete Edition

The complete volume contains 280 letters from 1947-1953 and an analytical section examining forms of address, the social origins of the writers, the reasons households were placed on "kulak" lists, the conduct of local officials, the content of the requests, and the subsequent fates of those who signed them.

Recommended bibliographic citation

Țăranu, Mariana S. (ed.). *Scrisori către Stalin sau spovedaniile celor ocupați (1947-1953)*. Chișinău: Pontos, 2014. 520 pp. ISBN 978-9975-51-601-3.

Author's website: **marianataranu.eu**

© Mariana S. Țăranu, 2014, 2026. All rights reserved. English editorial version for author review; not for distribution before approval.

APPENDIX

Draft Open-Access Blog Page

Editorial note

This section is intended for author review and will not be included in the free PDF. Once approved, it will be published as an open English-language page on the website.

Five Letters to Stalin from Bessarabia

Why did people who had experienced famine, confiscation, and deportation continue to address Stalin as "father," "teacher," and "someone close to us"?

In 2014, historian Mariana S. Țăranu published the documentary volume *Scrisori către Stalin sau spovedaniile celor ocupați (1947-1953)*. It contains 280 letters found in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova. Their authors wrote about famine, excessive taxation, confiscations, forced collectivization, and deportations.

This free brochure presents five individual lives. These are not the most sensational stories, but five documents that reveal how ordinary people tried to speak to a state before which they were virtually defenseless.

The Story of Filip Talpă

In the spring of 1949, the sixty-six-year-old peasant Filip Talpă wrote to Stalin for the fourth time. Both he and his wife were ill; they were refused admission to the collective farm, while their household continued to be classified as "kulak."

In his letter, Talpă called Stalin the "father of the Soviet people" and asked to be removed from the list.

"I, Talpă F. F., write to you with a trembling hand... Because of old age and illness, we await only death and the grave." After four letters, his request was not granted. On the night of 5-6 July 1949, Filip Talpă, his wife, and their two adult children were deported to Kurgan Oblast.

Inside the Brochure

- an appeal from teachers whose children ate oilseed cake during the famine;
- the plea of a blind old man branded a "kulak";
- Filip Talpă's fourth letter before deportation;
- a letter from an exiled father who had lost two sons in the war;
- a young widow's complaint ending with the words: "I kiss you many, many times."

DOWNLOAD THE FREE BROCHURE

After entering an email address, the reader receives the PDF. The form should be accompanied by a brief privacy notice and an option to decline future messages.

Content of the Open-Access Page

The following will be freely available on the page:

1. an introduction to the project and an explanation of why people wrote to Stalin;
2. the story of Filip Talpă and one short passage from his letter;
3. several images of the documents once reproduction rights have been confirmed;
4. information about the complete 2014 volume;
5. the embedded film Dear Stalin...;
6. a button for downloading the free brochure.

The complete texts of the other four letters will remain inside the PDF. This preserves the brochure's value and helps build a distinct English-language readership rather than limiting the project to anonymous page views.

To Be Confirmed Before Publication

- consistent use of the author's name as Mariana S. Țăranu, including Romanian diacritics;
- permission to reproduce scans of the archival documents;
- the five original Russian documents for textual collation;
- an author photograph for the page and brochure;
- the official link to the English version of the film Dear Stalin...;
- the final copyright wording and the method by which readers may obtain the complete edition.