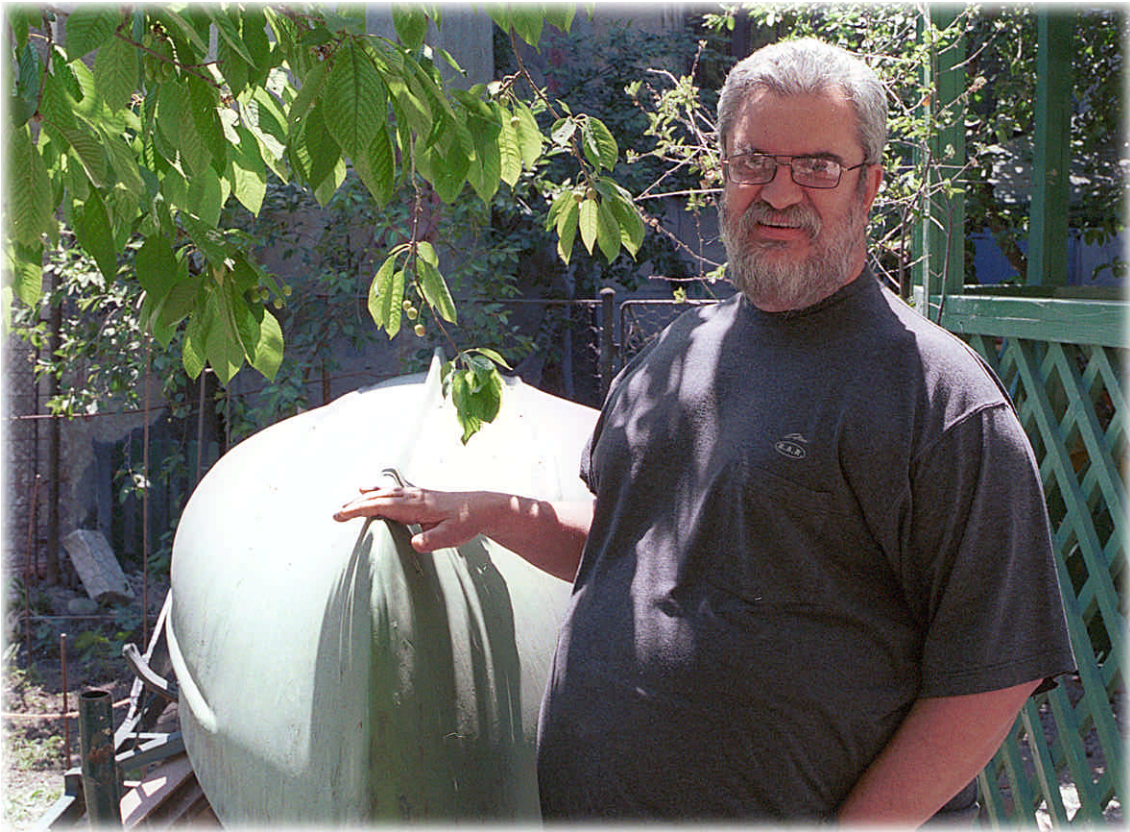


Making Ends Meet

Mila 23, Danube Delta, Romania



Anton Radu Roman

Anton Radu Roman is a well-known Romanian writer. During the Communist period he was exiled to the Delta, and during his time there he got to know the people of the Delta very well. He later wrote a novel about his experiences there and about the people he got to know.

Anton loves the people of the Delta. He sees the 12,000 people who live there as an integral and essential part of the life of the Delta. He told us about the different kinds of people who live in the Delta:

Lipoveni, 'Old Believers' from Belorussia, who fled their homeland between 1600 and 1750, because of religious persecution. They have become fishermen in the Delta and are, traditionally, distinguished by their beards. They have very small pieces of dry land around their villages, where they make gardens for growing vegetables.

Cossacks from the Ukraine, who were exiled to the Delta by Empress Catherine the Great of Russia in 1775, under an agreement with the Turks who administered the area at that time. They are usually called 'Hoholi'. They are soldiers and agriculturalists, and they settled in parts of the Delta with some dry land, so that they are able to grow some crops as well as fishing. They fish at sea as well as in the lakes and waterways of the Delta.

Romanian shepherds from Transylvania, who have settled in parts of the Delta where there is enough dry land for them to keep animals – but they fish too!

Life in the Delta, he explained to us, centres on fish – if you don't fish you don't eat. Food means fish - people have very little else to eat. He sees the lives of the people of the Delta as a difficult, lonely, dangerous one, exposed to 'wild nature'. So they love to meet new people, outsiders – if the outsiders follow the local rules!

Anton doesn't believe that it is right to stop the local people from fishing during certain periods or in the most protected areas. In the Delta Biosphere Reserve there are areas which are strictly protected which are actually fenced off and local people cannot even enter, let alone fish – but, he says, the birds can fish there! He doesn't agree with stopping the local fishermen from fishing during the 'prohibition period' of 2 or 3 months each year when the fish are breeding (June-August). Compensation is given in theory, but Anton explained that the Romanian government cannot afford to give this to the people. So, he said, the people are forced to poach. There are rangers and frontier police policing the waterways, stopping fishing, but people fish secretly.

There is, Anton believes, a hidden, unacknowledged agenda in stopping the people of the Delta from fishing freely. He thinks that some environmentalists believe that it would be better if the people of the Delta left, since the environmental management of the Delta would be easier if that happened. Should this ever come to pass, for him it would be a disaster.