

**POLITICAL IDENTITY
IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA:
BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

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Abstract: *This study aims to realize a critical analysis of the theorizations that configure the post-decembrist Romanian political identity characteristics consistent with the current theoretical models in terms of transition to a democratic post-communist regime. In Romania, the transition from the “democratic” socialist state to the “liberal” democracy has brought fundamental institutional changes, but nonetheless, the representations of the nation-state remain polarized between East-West paradigms.*

Keywords: *Romanian political identity, democratic values, post-communism, Eastern paradigm, Western paradigm.*

Some Contemporary Perceptions and Theorizations

Beginning with the second half of the 20th century, the conceptions on the identity in all its components already have a “history” from which emerges the idea that identity is not just a matter of self-definition and self-perception, but also a problem of description and recognition by the others.

In this respect, the post-revolutionary fervor searches of the Romanian identity after 1989 (some attempting to recover the interwar period model and other asserting the need to adopt the current model of European construction) may be explained by the fact that, during communism, the representants of the ideological propaganda have built a false identity of Romania. As with the case for those individuals who perceive themselves in a manner at least unrealistic and should endeavor to accredit an image that others do not recognize, a fictional self-consciousness can also operate for the community, stimulated by the propaganda-machine in order to legitimize a condition of things that was considered as defining. In communist Romania, in addition to the real recoveries since the '65-'80s of some values truly defining for the Romanian culture, beyond the creation of new material and cultural values, the socialist political identity can

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be found in the Romanian Communist Party documents of the epoch, in the official historiography and this conception still has adherents today. The functioning of this mechanism has been a subject of literary creation for both the Eastern and Western writers.

An insight into this period (though it seems to belong to the past, it reflects the lead wires of the current identity) presents Mihai Botez in terms of a “prospective comunismologie research”¹. Since the late '80s, Mihai Botez noticed that on the Romanian reality there are at least two points of view: that of power, declaring the socialist epoch as the greatest era in the history of Romania, and the opposite view, believing that Romania is in a deep crisis and through one of the most difficult periods from its entire existence. But of course, beyond these two extremes there are many other attitudes, perhaps more nuanced and voicing a larger social weight².

According to Mihai Botez, if indeed communism has passed – like a crises –, instead remain passed many sequels that will not suddenly disappear. And unfortunately these sequels mark Romanian political identity, in terms of both individual and collective recent history: “Thus, the reflexes of individual behavior and group behavior – formed and cultivated during the dictatorship – still persist in large areas of social life in Romania. Both the governors and the subjects remain contaminated by the intolerance germs. All Romanians whom I met after the revolution are convinced that they – and only they – are right when discuss such difficult issues of the transition ritual (...); the idea that the adversary-partner of discussion might be right, and that ‘the justice’ is achieved through negotiation between the justices of the ‘parts’, a so natural idea in democracy seems a fallacy to the Romanian after 1989”³.

Shortly, this polarization of opinion is a feature of post-communist Romanian political identity – insofar this attitude suggests the refusal of the dialogue, as a consequence of a typical mentality for a closed society.

And the importance of this issue in the frame of a modern nation is highlighted by George Schöpflin which showed that the identity takes shape through the synthesis of all types of “collective human activity”. But in the political area, there are four significant processes of identity formation: “the increase in complexity and intensity” of the modern state, “the network of associations” and civil society activities, “ethnicity” and “the importance given to the international dimension”⁴.

Among the theorizations that configure the post-decembrist Romanian political identity characteristics, consistent with the current theoretical models in terms of transition to a democratic post-communist regime, Radu Florian’s complex and still highly topical study shows that “the disadvantages of the rupture from the totalitarian regime in Romania was the highest over all other Eastern European

¹Mihai Botez, *România despre ei înșiși. O cercetare de comunismologie prospectivă*, Bucharest, Litera Publishing House, 1992, p. 36-37.

²*Ibidem*, p. 9.

³*Ibidem*, p. 104.

⁴George Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power*, New York, New York University Press, 2000, p. 29-30.

countries. (Only in the former Soviet Union they have had even tougher effects)⁵. The main cause of this situation was “the deeply oppressive Ceaușescu regime” that caused “its explosive removal, by a revolt of masses of people” and “the implosion of state power, the collapse of the regime’s main decision-making institutions that generated vacuum of the central and local authority”. The “anarchic” situation in the first months of 1990 “was extended in various ways until 1992-1993”, during which “large areas of the social tissue, of the human relationships have destroyed, with multiple traumatic consequences on people’s lives, some irreversible”. Also, the “legislative and institutional vacuum caused disturbances and failures that were long imprinted on the various manifestations of society”⁶. On the other hand, talking about the achievements and limits of political transition in Romania, Radu Florian points out, since the second half of the first decade post-decembrist, that “at least from a essential standpoint, that of the civil and political liberties, the metamorphosis of the Romanian society is a fundamental, even radical one”⁷. And this idea, that can constitute the benchmarks of the political identity, is detailed in a substantial analysis which shows that a democratic regime can be identified by three levels of manifestation, involving as many criteria of determination. The first level is that of civil society, i.e. “the civil rights and freedoms by which one can express the diversity of interest groups and define the expression space of the citizens”. And this was done in post-totalitarian Romania in a form never seen before in history, as a “explosion of the liberties and of the social groups”, as freedom of the press, freedom of speech and manifestation in all plans: at the level of organization and the trade union option, at the level of political or religious options, even if penetration of the democratic principles and values in the deeper layers of collective mentality and behaviors has a slightly slower rhythm⁸.

As to the second level of recognition of a democratic regime, namely “the parliamentary structure, based on the general application of civil rights, the separation of powers, the multiparty system and the respecting the role of the opposition, ensuring some form of control over the exercise of power by civil society”, according to Radu Florian, in the ’90s appear as “undeniable the existence of a democratic political system in our country” and “inoperative various phenomena, its shortcomings and the precariousness does not cancel its democratic matrix”⁹.

Regarding the third level of expression of a democratic regime, that of “the social control over its centers of power, i.e. those groups which decisively determine the political action and its direction”¹⁰, Radu Florian noticed that the real cooperation between the powers of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are still an aspiration, and the achievement of the civil society implies

⁵ Radu Florian, “Probleme critice ale tranziției societății românești”, in *Tranziții în modernitate. România în secolele XIX-XX*, ed. cit., p. 329.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 333.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 334.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 335.

a much longer duration. On the other hand, the main weakness in the functioning of democracy in Romania consists in “the non-establishment of the Authority of the rule of law, without which all the social relations are unbalanced”¹¹.

Another flaw of the Romanian transitional democracy consists in “the technocratic bureaucracy and corporatism”, which makes the social policy “the most deficient field of the governance”¹².

To the recognition criteria concerning political identity set out by Schöpflin and tot those laid by Florian for establishing the identity of a democratic political regime, we can explicitly add the doctrinal and ideological typology of parties. In this respect, in the post-communist Romanian political landscape were found almost all kinds of relevant parties based on the classification on ideological criterion of parties performed by Klaus von Beyme. As Constantin Nica pointed out, Beyme classifies the parties in “ideological families” and thus distinguishes them in liberal and radical parties, conservative parties, socialist and social democratic parties, Christian democratic parties, communist parties, agrarian parties, regionalist and ethnic parties, right-wing extremist parties, ecologist parties”¹³. In this respect, the early '90s Romanian landscape was very variegated. However, the dominant position on political scene was taken by the National Salvation Front (FSN), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the National Peasant Party (PNT) – which over time have gone through structural and doctrinal changes. In the political scene have also evolved Conservative Party, Socialist Labour Party, the Movement for Romania, the Greater Romania Party, the New Generation Party, the People’s Democratic Party, etc. The current government coalition, the Social Liberal Union (USL) is made up of three parties so different in doctrinal terms – i.e. the Social Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party – that their synthesis even reflects a specific Romanian political identity.

Regarding the Romanian political regime, Aristide Cioabă in his work *Romanian political system* analyzes the “drama of dictatorships”, “collapse of the communist totalitarian dictatorship”, “institutionalization of democratic postcommunist regime” for answer to the question: “What kind of democratic constitutional system implies our political system from the perspective of ‘constitutional engineering’ and from the perspective of the changes that have been made?”¹⁴. According to this research, the formulas of the constitutional engineering projects and, more recently, the institutional comparativism that the political science has analyzed are three: parliamentary regimes, presidential regimes and semi-presidential regimes. With regard to the identity of the contemporary Romanian political regime, Aristide Cioabă prefers the category of the regime of “apparently semi-presidential”. This is because, under the Constitution of 1991 – inspired by the 5th French Constitution, which is considered the prototype of the semi-presidential system,

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 336-337.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 339.

¹³ Constantin Nica, *Sisteme de partide contemporane*, second volume, Bucharest, Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale, 2011, p. 64-65.

¹⁴ Aristide Cioabă, *Sistemul politic român*, Bucharest, Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale, 2007, p. 286.

“the relations between the president, prime minister, government and parliament outlines a formula that in functional and legal point of view approaches more to the parliamentary system than to the semi-presidential one”¹⁵. If we want to know what can do the president and what he can not do and also to know the president’s relations with the government, the same work exposes in the language of political science a “dramatic” situation whose spectators we are daily through media: “an apparently coherent division of executive power between the president, symbolic in the peace time, but empowered with supreme executive attributes in time of war or exceptional occurrences, and a prime minister and a government”. The exerting of the “permanent executive and general attributes concerning the development and implementation of public policies, subjected to the constant parliamentary majority support, does not guarantee, by itself, the possibility of a smooth and effective cooperation between the two heads of the executive”¹⁶.

Another flaw of the Romanian political system is the lack of political representativeness, characteristic for its identity now, as was always.

From the “Eastern” Paradigm to the “European” Paradigm

The presentation of these few reflective exercises are able to express the difficult process of settlement of the Romanian political identity in the conditions of a not always advantageous heritage capable to ensure otherwise the condition of continuity. And the difficulty is the more striking if we compare it with the observation that “people’s identity, the identity between the rulers and ruled, the identity which can give expression to the will of the unity of the people is the basic principle of contemporary democracies”. The author, Gaetano Azzariti completes these inferences with the profound idea that identity, “by transcending the issues that divide the social body itself, can define and determine the shape of the political unity“. And “the shape of the unity, tributary to the political time and to the social order, is based on the belief that it is possible to determine an identification, without residue and without contradictions, of the people in the state and of the state in the Constitution”¹⁷. Or, Romanian Constitution was modified several times throughout its modern history, sometimes radically, and after the political change of 1989 it was revised on two occasions and this will probably happen again. But, on the other hand, returning to Radu Florian’s study, we should agree that “the modernization can not be summed up today in the slogans as ‘informational society’, or ‘European integration’“. No matter how significant they are, they does not reveal the specific route for a society when and where “industrialization is not exhausted, but we have to accomplish it with other methods than previous ones, where facets of the economy must be subjected to new rationalizations profitable not only for a minority, but one capable of stimulating the mobility of civil society, the main criterion of a

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 287.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Gaetano Azzariti, *Critica della democrazia identitaria*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2008, p. 26.

genuine social development”¹⁸. This because, between West and East there is a “disparity”, as noted Schöpflin, visible first of all in the thinking and in the style of discourse, the first described by Westerners themselves as pragmatic, rational, professional, future-oriented and structured on explicit values. On the other hand, post-communists are regarded as highly dependent on history, addicted to the pathos and to the sentiment of justice and resentments. In the post-communist period, even Western and Eastern “patterns” of nationalism seem to recur, as Schöpflin notes¹⁹.

Paradoxically, we find that Romania’s current political identity consists in the transition, and this process can be described as the difficult attempt in recent years to build a state of law, as was shown with arguments. The transition from the communist regime to a democratic regime meant a shift of paradigm for Romania (as in other former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe), and this change which means, among others, the adoption of “European paradigm” (Andrei Marga) implies a summing up (or assuming) of the European identity²⁰ structured on the values of an “economic Europe, political Europe and social Europe” as well as of an “Europe of solidarity”²¹, whose dimension concerning the identity is recalculated by taking into account the immigrants.

It remains the question whether the integration of Romania into a federal superstate, such as the Federation of European States affects its national identity. If we return to the idea of the political identity that entail democratic values (as condition of integration), which actually is proper for the process of building the modern Romanian state, the national dimension is not affected. If we return to the analogy based on the relation “individual self” – “collective self”, just as the individual identity of the individual is affected when he moves from one space to another, something fundamental is changing also in the case of a country when it is “moved” from the space of a territorial autonomy with well-defined neighbors, in an uncertain space of a new political structure designed as “a federation that can operate through a mutualisation of the sovereignty”²². Even the adoption of the Copenhagen criteria through which is recognized the European political identity of a state involves, in fact, a kind of alteration of the national political identity²³.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 343.

¹⁹ George Schöpflin, *op. cit.*, p. 31-32.

²⁰ Roberto Scagno proposes “Europeanism” as an alternative global identity – Roberto Scagno, “Identitatea națională și obsesia identității”, in vol. *Ipostaze ale identității românești. Al treilea Colocviu Internațional de Studii Românești din Cehia, Praga 30-31 octombrie 2008 * Podoby Rumunské identity. III. Meyinárovni kolokvium české rumunistiky Praha 30.-31. Řijna 2008*, Editor: Libuše Valentová, Secția de Limbă și Literatură română, Institutul de Studii Romanice, Facultatea de Litere a Universității Caroline și Asociația Cehia-România * Rumunské oddělení Ústavu románských studií FFUK a Česko-rumunská společnost, Praha, 2009, p. 51.

²¹ Donatella della Porta, Manuela Caiani, *Quale Europa? Europizzazione, identità e conflitti*, Bologna, Il Molino, 2006, p. 95-102.

²² “European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso presented at Strasbourg, in the European Parliament a new conception of the structure of the European Union: ‘A federation of nation-states it is our political horizon. I call on a federation of nation-states. Not a superstate, but a federation that can operate through a mutualisation of sovereignty’” – Sebastian Zachmann, *Adevărul*, 17 September 2012.

²³ At the European Council in Copenhagen (1993) the European Union decided that “the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe”, that wish become members once they will prove themselves able to satisfy certain economic and political requirements – “Copenhagen criteria”. The fulfillment of these criteria

As we have pointed out, in Romania the transition from the “democratic” socialist state to the “liberal” democracy brought fundamental institutional changes, but nonetheless, the representations of the nation-state remain polarized between East and West paradigms. And all the more as the de-Stalinization started under Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej (in 1953, along with Stalin’s death) and continued under Nicolae Ceaușescu, did not mark discontinuation of cultural and diplomatic relations between Romania and the Russia. On the other hand, the socialism did not mean the rejection of all the values that contributed to the definition of European identity, this trend itself being a European creation.

But beyond civic and political values underlying the rule of law and defining the political identity (in this case congruent with the core values of European identity), the political identity of a state is defined by the symbols around which collective narratives are constructed. In this respect, the Romanian society is not a chorus singing the melody of European unification and Euro-Atlantic integration with a single voice: beyond the “yesterday” nostalgia for the Western model and behind the “today” nostalgia for Eastern model, the issue of nation-state’s independence – from East or from West – remains an obsession of the Romanian political imaginary. But it is not clear the doctrinal orientation of political forces which adopt the Western model or the Eastern model. In this respect, a fair question would be: from the ideological-doctrinaire point of view, the current Romanian political identity Romania is rather liberal, or rather conservative?

Between Romania’s EU membership and Romania’s affiliation to the block of socialist states have passed more than a decade. If during the socialist state there was a reaction of independence in relation to the Soviet Union, today Romanian leaders are “obedient” to the EU leaders, but this, of course, based on the premise that from a geographic and cultural point of view, Romania, just like Russia, belongs to Europe. The difference between yesterday and today is that now, in principle, Romanian citizen can consider himself also an EU citizen, whereas in the past he could not consider himself an Union Soviet citizen, but a resident in the sphere of influence of this empire that brought European spirit in Romanian culture in the early 19th century²⁴. We have returned to the West by the tendency or desire (often just stated through a “wooden” language of a new

requires to the candidate countries to achieve: a) the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, the human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, b) a functioning market economy as well as the ability to withstand to the pressures of competition and Union’s internal market forces, c) the willingness to assume the obligations of membership, including adherence to the political, economic and monetary aims of the Union d) the conditions for integration by adapting administrative structures, so that the European Community legislation be transposed into national law and implemented through legislative and administrative structures – Adrian Severin, IDENTITATE EUROPEANĂ – IDENTITATE NAȚIONAL STATALĂ, http://www.mdrl.ro/_documente/info_integrare/romania_si_viit_europei/identitate.htm

²⁴ East–West European midline strongly emerges once with the modernity in the space of cultural syntheses and also in the spirit of a common origin, a phenomenon was observed in the following terms by Ion Ianoși: “If the Occident was built on Judeo-Christian, Greek and Roman sources, Russia assumed all through them, but in terms of her own destiny. This was approximated by the masters, with implicit or explicit literary devices and religious, ethical, philosophical searches. For Russians, Pushkin remained supreme model. For Europeans Dostoevsky and Tolstoy became supreme models”. Ion Ianoși, *Autori și opere*, vol. 2, *Cultura rusă*, Bucharest, EuroPress Group, 2009, p. 14.

ideology) to share a democratic civic culture. But we have remained in the East because of the reality of a tribal or patriarchal political culture knowingly maintained by the authorities – as genuine “homo sovieticus” through undemocratic behaviours. Contrary to the situation characteristic to the socialist state, when individuals / Romanian citizens had democratic ideals, targeting the West, today a segment of the population has the nostalgia (at least from an economic point of view) oriented to the East as was before 1990.

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