

## The Implications of the Eastern Orthodoxy and Romania's Geopolitics in the South - Eastern Europe

Angela Mihaela Ene<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper proposes an analysis of the international relations promoted and developed by Romania in the geopolitical field from the perspective of historical axes of Eastern Orthodoxy. From a geopolitical point of view, the foreign policy of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe is part of a dynamics of changes, in the form of a metamorphosis of extremely rapid and versatile methods and instruments of action that, from our perspective, reveal the presence of new entities with an extremely important role in the Eastern European geopolitical scene, namely the Eastern Orthodox Church. Against the background of new socio-political and security changes at global and regional level, Romania is in the middle of a strategic macrothinking built by the great powers, for a horizon that involves only securing and developing the major interests that are a benefit to them. Thus, at this moment, the main religious dogmas of the world represent the factor with a double role in global stability and security. The role is twofold, since the effects generated can be both positive and negative. The novelty of this approach is the formation and coagulation of an Eastern Orthodox axis, which, through a paradigm shift, seeks to consolidate and affirm purely political and economic interests that are more of a state interest than the autonomous ecclesial entity. Under these circumstances, it is interesting to observe and pursue the process of involvement and fusion of the two entities, namely the Eastern Orthodox state and church, which normally just co-exist.

**Keywords:** Eastern orthodoxism; geopolitics; axis; Romania

### 1. Introduction

The Eastern Orthodoxy is represented by all Christian churches that separated themselves from the Western tradition (Rome) to follow one of the ancient patriarchs (Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople).

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Romania. Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania. Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290, Corresponding author: angelamihaela.ene@univ-danubius.ro.

In a geographical group we can speak of: the Orthodox churches in the Middle East, the Orthodox churches in Central and Eastern Europe, a church that closely follows the Byzantine tradition (Constantinoplean). Generally known as “Eastern Orthodoxy”, they include the autonomous churches of Russia, Romania, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Poland, Albania and Sinai and the Orthodox Diaspora organized outside traditional Orthodox countries, these ecclesiastical communities being in Western Europe, North and South America, Africa, Japan, China and Australia.

The relation of the church with the state entity has always been in an interdependence that has had the role of securing their structural integrity and obviously of taking advantage of each other. In addition to the dogmatic aspect promoted by orthodoxy among the adherents, we can also find a role that has often been treated as less important, namely the role of a transnational actor. These transnational implications are carried out following a well-defined conduct and respecting the international relations rules specific to interstate cooperation.

The changes and transformations from a global perspective, in all respects, did not make the Eastern ecclesiastical world have an indifferent attitude. The importance of the exploitation of the present by Eastern Orthodox churches from the perspective of ancient dogmas, is transposed into concrete international actions and policies that can only be accomplished through close collaboration and cooperation with the state entity.

Against the background of ensuring a geopolitical socio-economic security environment, the Eastern and South-Eastern European states put into practice and use strategic approaches that, in fact, do not omit, but actually imply, the capacity and force of the Eastern Orthodoxy to produces long-term construction in this direction.

## **2. Content**

Romania's geopolitics has a greater representation of the Romanian state's defensive position than of the strategic pole in some offensive socio-political configuration in the region. At this point, Romania is a European state in a process of integration into a body based on a geographic area, a body which together with the great powers of the globe is the new configuration of the world order and obviously, the new process of economic- socio-political metamorphosis at the end of which a new balance will be established between these global powers.

Any geopolitical approach of Romania must be embedded in the European context that represents the legal and structural framework in the sphere of large-scale actions that Romania could undertake. The fact that we are an integral part of this European body, called the European Union, places us on the limit of some manifestations of interests, some starting from the outside of the Romanian state, others starting from the intra-European power centre, limits that we must have the intelligence and ability to manage in favour of the nation and the Romanian people.

In this process of unification and transformation, the European Union is the space of confluence of the cultures and religions of all peoples of this political and super-state construction, which produces a certain order and well-being within it, depending on a multitude of elements of each constituent state unit.

What we consider to be of particular importance to the Union's peoples is represented by the religious affiliation of its members. In this situation, we notice that the fundamental poles of interstate communion are placed on two religious pillars represented by the two secular churches, the Western Church and the Eastern Church. The momentum of the two Churches throughout the history of Europe is now transformed into a binder which has the role of connecting, of imparting progress and welfare.

In this socio-political construction, the Romanian Orthodox Church as an integral part of the Romanian state has a well defined role and, last but not least, the role as a transnational actor in Romania's geopolitical strategies.

The Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Western and Southern Europe is one of three similar structures that the Romanian Orthodox Church organized outside the country after the fall of the communist regime. Apart from the three Metropolitanates, the religious institution also has a number of Bishops, Archbishops and Representatives.

The Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Western and Southern Europe was organized in the present form on the basis of what was the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Central and Western Europe during the communist regime and, since 1998, the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Western Europe. The current structure includes the Romanian Orthodox communities in nine states of Western and

Southern Europe: France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland and Netherlands.<sup>1</sup>

Considering Romania's effort to protect its own national interests and to develop strategic partnerships with the EU member states, but also to carry out its foreign policy interests with the rest of the world, it is obvious that the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church is a very important one. The Western direction of Romania is and must be supported by the Christian-Eastern axis, which, beyond the ecclesiastical background, it is important to understand and use the mechanisms of international relations for the benefit of the nation represented by it.

In our opinion, the dispute between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Church of Moscow, against the background of the Basarabian Metropolitanate, should be placed on a second plan and this is because the dynamics of changes within the European Union are much more important for a new foreign policy strategy of Romania, than the old issues that are more about dogma than about the evolution of a national spirit.

With a much clearer direction and against the background of a previous construction, the Greek Orthodox Church acquired a vanguard position in relation to the European fora, thus making the tandem state-church entity take on another role in the foreign policy mechanism.

For the Greek Church, the main reason is the respect for the rights earned and set out in the Treaty of the European Union, namely the equal distribution of income and for the Greek State, obviously the support in the foreign policy plan. A concrete and up-to-date example is the collaboration between the Greek Church and the Greek state regarding the renaming of the state of Macedonia: on Friday, Greece's premier, Alexis Tsipras, appealed to the Orthodox church in his country to show restraint about the name of Macedonia, which makes the subject of some negotiations between Athens and Skopje. "I hope you will contribute (...) so that Greece (...) will successfully deal with this problem (...) without repeating the mistakes of the past", Tsipras wrote to the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Ieronymos.

One day before, the Greek church opposed any compromise regarding the name of Macedonia, the same as a province in Northern Greece. The neighbouring state was received in the UNO under the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

---

<sup>1</sup> Raluca Sănduș Dima, (2017). *The Romanian Orthodox Church - transnational actor. The relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Communities in Western Europe after 1990*, p. 9.

(FYROM), AFP reminds. Greece considers that the simple name of Macedonia implies territorial claims on its province with the same name, and a distinctive geographic term, such as “Northern Macedonia”, should be added for the country. Greece's opposition, because of this dispute, is an obstacle to Macedonia's accession to the European Union and NATO. On Thursday, the Greek Foreign Affairs Minister, Nikos Kotzias, met in Thessaloniki with his Macedonian homologous in an attempt to resume diplomatic efforts for a compromise, Reuters reported. Next Wednesday, the two sides will discuss with a United Nations mediator.<sup>1</sup>

In the formulation of the Treaty on the European Union Functioning, the field of relations between States and Churches or other organizations mentioned in art. 17 falls under the principle of subsidiarity, stipulated by art. 5 (3) of the Treaty regarding the European Union, which states that: “Under the principle of subsidiarity, in the areas not falling within its exclusive competence, the Union shall intervene only if and to the extent that the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states, either at central level or at regional and local level, but due to the dimension and effects of the envisaged action, can be better achieved at Union level”. (Acc. to The Official Journal, C 326, 26/10/2012).<sup>2</sup>

The interest of both entities, Greece and the Greek Church, is thus governed by Law 4146/2013 which gives the Church full authority to administer its properties and Law 4182/2013 created the *Society for the administration of the Church's assets*, the capital of which is equally divided between the Greek State and the Church and whose Board of Directors consists of two representatives of the Government and three of the Archbishop of Athens. Specifically, the Church's real estate (approximately 3-4% of the Church's original properties) will be transferred for a period of 99 years to this society, that will be allowed to rent them, but not sell them. The proceeds will be divided equally between the State and the Church.<sup>3</sup>

Romania can benefit from the support of the Romanian Orthodox Church and it is recommended to do so considering the new international configurations. More specifically, the move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem and the Memorandum of the Romanian Government to move Romania's ambassadors to Jerusalem is a fact that incites the position of European leaders towards Romania. The positioning of Romania alongside the United States of America in this manner is not a very comfortable matter for our intra-European relations. In this situation,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.agerpres.ro>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://basilica.ro/>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://basilica.ro/>.

even through the organizational mechanisms of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which functions besides the European fora, namely, the Permanent Bureau of the Romanian Orthodox Church within the Institutions of the European Union, Romania can use the role of church communicator for a better understanding of the external policy that Romania has in relation to the non-EU states.

Romania has two geostrategic corridors, namely the continental corridor and the Euro-Atlantic corridor. On the mainland, we can talk about intra-community relations and realities with non-EU states and on the Euro-Atlantic area we mostly talk about cooperation with the United States of America. Both corridors of strategic interest are and must remain important in the geopolitics of Romania and the innovative approach of international relations must be the essential criterion of construction for Romania's foreign policy.

In our opinion, we propose an approach on the continental corridor of close collaboration and cooperation with the Eastern Orthodox Church, through the Romanian Orthodox Church, which can play an extremely important role in the matter of national identity, but also a role of tempering certain movements of Romania as a result of Euro-Atlantic cooperation.

Romania's long-term development strategy must include certain measures in which the ecclesial entity has well-defined goals in the area of human rights and fulfills the polarization function of the nation. Thus, the state entity would fully exploit its core functions and would substantially contribute to the development of its own nation.

These approaches have not been left unnoticed at the level of the European structures, they have been and are being carefully monitored, a proof being an article published in *TABOR* magazine which states that: "The European concerns manifested by the Romanian Orthodox Church were materialized in February 2000, when the Holy Synod appointed Metropolitan Joseph of Western and Southern Europe as representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church next to the European Institutions. Once Romania's accession to the European Union on the 1st January 2007 became certain, the organization of the Permanent Bureau of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Brussels began. The Orthodox Community in Romania is the most important as number of Orthodox communities in the candidate countries or members of the European Union and, in this context, the Romanian Orthodox Church understands to invest all the means at its disposal to favour a framework of institutional, pan-Orthodox, ecumenical, inter-religious and intercultural collaboration.

The representation has primarily the mission to ensure an effective communication between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the institutions of the European Union and to effectively participate in the establishment of a framework of institutional, pan-Orthodox, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation in Brussels; to participate in the mobilization actions of the European Churches in support of religious values in the process of institutional consolidation of the Union and to ensure the connection between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the institutions that support information, social, educational or cultural projects; to assist in the understanding of European mechanisms and the capacity to adapt to the used practices and to create and develop partnerships to facilitate access to European platforms and networks.

The main activities of the Representation are focused on the systematic pursuit of primary information and its transformation into *knowledge*; the development of *Lobby* and *Advocacy* campaigns; assistance in forming strategic/ synergic partnerships; organizing and hosting events, information campaigns, training sessions.

The Representation is headed by His All-Holiness Joseph, the Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe, supported by the Council of Representatives coordinated by a resident counselor in Brussels. Within this council there are specialists in the field of Church and State relations, in the field of Social theology and other topical areas for European debates.”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Conclusions

Starting from the existence of the common point between the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church, that of a transnational actor, we can conclude that the two entities have the capacity to act in a unitary way regarding the maintenance and development of national interests at international level . If on the Euro-Atlantic side, Romania already functions as a strategic and trustworthy partner for the United States of America, in the mainland Romania's foreign policies can benefit from a genuine support from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Within the framework of the good relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the other Eastern churches, except for Moscow, a hybrid cooperation framework can be developed in the field of international relations, especially intra-community relations, a framework of cooperation that brings to the fore the Romanian nation

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tabor-revista.ro/>

and the Romanian state in terms of our economic, social and political consolidation. The creation of this Orthodox axis on the South Eastern Europe - Western Europe relation is only the materialization of some desiderata considered by both the ecclesiastical and the state entity. A diplomatically empowered Romania is a Romania of the future, a future that takes place in a globalist and highly selective mechanism for the nations.

#### 4. Bibliography

Dima, Raluca Sănduș (2007). *Biserica Ortodoxă Română – actor transnațional. Relațiile dintre Biserica Ortodoxă Română și comunitățile ortodoxe române din Europa Occidentală după 1990* / “The Romanian Orthodox Church - transnational actor. The relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox communities in Western Europe after 1990”, p. 9.

Kolodziej, A. Edward (2007). *Securitatea și Relațiile Internaționale /The Security and International Relations*. Iasi: Polirom.

<https://www.agerpres.ro>.

<http://basilica.ro/>.

<http://basilica.ro/>.

<http://www.tabor-revista.ro/>.