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THE ORTHODOX *IN* AND *OUTSIDE* EU

Considerations on the relations between religion and nationalism in the Orthodox area

(working in progress - draft)

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"This is not to deny that Orthodox countries may share certain weaknesses in relation to modern political and economic developments, but it is to deny that their political future is determined by their Orthodox religious background, or that Western European countries gained anything politically from the eleventh to thirteenth century Schism between Rome and the other Patriarchates" (Carras 1998: 25).

"Originally, the Soviets planned to homogenize the vast European empire that had fallen into their hands at the end of the Second World War. In Milan Kundera's neat phrase, the aim was to achieve 'the minimum of diversity over the maximum of space' in a region that, on the contrary, was defined by 'a maximum of diversity over a minimum of space' (Michel 1991: 8).

"The Orthodox are coming!" The Orthodox in EU

"The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!" was a 1966 Hollywood spoof of Cold War attitudes. It portrays a Soviet submarine crew stranded on the coast of Maine. The Soviet sailors end up winning over the local townspeople, who even help the sub to escape before U.S. Air Force planes arrive to sink it. The movie made light of the differences between Russians and Americans by suggesting that they had much more in common than they realized (Petro 2005).

Nicolai N. Petro, professor of political science at the University of Rhode Island (USA), takes this example as starting point for a debate concerning the condition of the Orthodox Christianity in Europe today. Here is his further comment: "as improbable as that story seemed back in 1966, an even more momentous encounter is currently taking place in Europe. Thanks to the expansion of the European Union, millions of Orthodox Christians now have a seat at the table of European decision-making bodies".

And he is right. The admission of Romania and Bulgaria will quadruple the number of Orthodox Christians in the EU, from 10 million to more than 40 million, but this is just "the tip of a very large iceberg". Although is not very certain right now, "should the EU continue to expand eastward, it could someday encompass as many as 200 million Orthodox believers, transforming Orthodox Christianity from a quaint minority into the largest denomination in Europe.

The main consequence is the change in the religious picture of the continent. The political weight of the Church within those countries is not declining, as it is in Western Europe, but growing (Dungaciu 2004; Borowik 1999; Borowik and Tomka 2001, Mueller 2003, Pollak 2003). Orthodox faithful expect to have "their voice heard within the European political institutions of which they are now a part, and this poses a direct challenge to the secular framework of the EU" (Petro 2005).

The second aspect is this: "with the fall of communism, the various branches of Christianity are once again in direct competition for members". Religious proselytism has already emerged as a source of tensions in several Orthodox countries.

Finally, "while most take it for granted that people in Eastern Europe will follow the Western path of modernization, it is certainly worth pondering what impact the values of Orthodox Eastern Europe will have on the West, and the potential danger of an intra-European clash of cultures, if a common ground is not found" (ibid.).

Nicolai N. Petro shares an assessment which has begun to gain ground in both Western and Eastern Europe: "It advocates a broader view of the process of European integration, by suggesting that the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity focus less on what has divided them, and more on re-acquiring the common cultural heritage that once united them". Of special importance is the "evolving Orthodox view of democracy and civil society". Nicolai N. Petro claims that there are two notable elements in Church life that directly contribute to the democratization of society: 1) the locus of its authority; and 2) its stewardship of the community. Unlike Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy is "highly decentralized and dispersed. There is no supreme papal authority overseeing the 15

autocephalous Local Orthodox Churches”. Ultimate authority rests with Church Councils that bring together the entire religious community—both laity and clergy. Within that context, “bishops are expected to administer their diocese in harmony with the will of both these groups”. Nicolai N. Petro also notices that a “new generation of Western scholars on religion (Zoe Knox, Christopher Marsh, Elizabeth Prodromou, Nikolas Gvosdev) have even applied Western literature on civil society to contemporary Orthodoxy”, by looking at the Church’s highly delegative, almost “confederative” system of administration, and focusing on its community-centered initiatives. As a result, “the Church itself has become a place of dialogue, a space existing outside the state, the government, or the family, devoted to the preservation of an autonomous sphere for the individual, and a protector of the inherent foundations of human freedom from the arbitrary rule of outside forces.”

But this is not enough: something must be changed at the level of perceptions and mentalities: “if the dividing line between East and West continues to exist in our hearts and minds, removing it from the political map of Europe will accomplish very little”.

And this is true. There are many reasons why religious/cultural categorizations often break down. Religious thought, like other forms of thought, develops. Peoples can hold two very different attitudes at the same time, readily, provided they are not in contradiction and with some difficulty even when they are. This is easier to the degree a religion is separable from politics, “either because of the general tenor is teaching, or because of its origins and early history; so it is generally easier in say Buddhist or Christian countries, harder in Islamic ones” (Carras 1998: 23). This is not the only reason, however. Another one is *education*. In the long run Europeans “must become much better educated about their common Byzantine and Eastern Christian heritage. Even in the short run, however, the essential elements of this common inheritance can be used to shore up pan-European democratic institutions”. Nicolai N. Petro quotes recent scholarship by Silvia Ronchey, Helene Ahrweiler, and Antonio Carile, which “provide a conceptual link between Byzantine political thought and the modern age, and highlight how much current European aspirations to pluri-culturalism and subsidiarity (the idea that matters should be handled by the lowest competent authority), have in common with the Byzantine political model”(Petro 2005).

All this is true. The Orthodox in UE brings more religiosity, more “European history”, and more pressure on Western stereotypes, perceptions, or misperceptions. *Deconstruction* of the former “histories of Europe” (Dungaciu 2000), and *education* should be two important ingredients in order to achieve a more effective “public space” and, in the end, a more integrated Europe.

“*The Orthodox are coming!*” - and they are not a danger. Neither they, nor their so-called “civilization.

At this point, two developments mentioned by Nicolai N. Petro should be assessed. The first one is the idea of a “clash of cultures” view that regards Orthodoxy as anti-modern and anti-Western: “If that occurs, we will have succeeded only in pushing the dividing line through the heart of Europe a little further east of where it was before”.

And the second one is the view of the Russian Orthodox Church as the pre-eminent political voice” of the Orthodox world. The Russian Orthodox Church will be the “pre-eminent voice of the Orthodox world”, claims Nicolai N. Petro, “because of its size and its impact on the whole Orthodox world”. And this will be true “regardless of whether Russia itself joins the EU, since more than half of its parishes are located outside Russia. For the first time since before the fall of Constantinople, Orthodox polities are part of the decision-making structures of Europe, yet little thought has been given to the impact this is likely to have on the political complexion of Europe” (ibid.).

These two ideas – the existence of a so-called “Orthodox civilization” within or outside UE (following in the footsteps of historians Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Samuel Huntington), and “the Russian Orthodox Church” as the “pre-eminent political voice” – will be discussed further on.

The Orthodox *outside* EU

Two years ago, the international news-agencies have presented the case of a Christian Orthodox priest from Macedonia, which empathetically assessed himself as being Orthodox above all and, consequently, he was openly pleading for maintaining the Orthodox Church of Macedonia under Serbian Orthodox Patriarchy jurisdiction. The outlook of that priest has been received with obvious irritation by the community: "he sold himself to the Greeks", "man of the Serbs", "Greek - Serbian conspiracy" – just a few of the accusations shouted out by the believing flock.

The reason is not difficult to be found: today, when the Orthodox Church of Macedonia attempts to free / unbind itself, canonically, from the Serbian Orthodox Church and to become completely self-governing (*autocephalous*), an attitude like the aforementioned one is only profitable to those who are fighting or opposing such an attempt. So, we have two “camps” here: on the one side, the people of Macedonia, on the other, of course, the Serbs and, normally as well, the Greeks, which are not quite fond of those to whom they do not even acknowledge the official name of their country.

The main reason is this: an independent Church would mean a huge step ahead towards the political and national independence, which Macedonia still feels being threatened - by Greece, in the first place.

Going out from this “normal” episode from the Balkans, this section is trying to unveil the political and geopolitical space in South Eastern Europe, taking into account two elements: *religion (Orthodox Christianity)* and *national identity*¹. The attitude towards these (both) elements is quite strange. Usually, they are simply ignored, as if they wouldn't exist, or as if we would not be able to realize that, for many people, almost the whole *mental*, and here from, *actional* pattern of these populations was directly or indirectly affected by such items.

Everything happens as if no one would like to improve the gap which is to often separating the approaches regarding Eastern Europe and the Eastern *reality / particularities* as such. In a technical language, this discrepancy is called, after Edward Said, "orientalism". The difference is that in the case of Eastern Europe, the authors which perpetuate this gap are not selected only among the Westerns, too often in too great a hurry to get a clear picture of a space they don't really understand or in which they are not interested (the classical Oriental case, according to Said) - but even by the *local* analyst. There is the hilarious form of an "ab - original orientalism", a dangerous sign of the Eastern elite detachment itself from its own space of expertise, action and manoeuvre². Not even the most subtle attempts to revive the so

¹ For a recent evaluation see Merdjanova 2000.

² The usual but not too adequate “explanation” of the resurrection of *religion* and/or *nationalism* in this area is that they have become a “substitute ideology” (an ideological *Ersatz*) replacing the old ideology (the communist one) – now “disenchanted” and, therefore, refuted and eliminated. The classical formulation of this view belongs to Adam Michnik and has been formulated in 1991: “Communism aspired to the role of a worldview that explained everything. After Communism there remained an ideological vacuum; and the end of Communism meant the opening of a Pandora's box. Into that vacuum began to creep demons from bygone epochs: ideologies proclaiming chauvinism and xenophobia, populism and intolerance. (...) Nationalism is the last word of Communism”. Some authors use “nationalism” as an ideological *Erzatz*, others, religion. But this so-called explanation remain, at best, naïve. First of all, because the disenchantment of the communist ideology has occurred, at least in Romania, even *before the Soviet occupation* of this part of Europe, and the *real* popular enthusiasm stirred – very rarely! – by the Communist Party (1945: the defeat of fascism in Europe; 1968: the opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia etc.) clearly vanished in the eighties. Therefore, to claim that the

called *security studies* had any notable effect in this respect - and I am referring here to what is usually called "The School of Copenhagen" for which religion and nation are crucial referent objects (see Buzan 1998:53, 123 - 124).

There are, surely, exceptions as well, and I shall quote them by their time.

In order to better point out the topic of this text – namely the importance of the nation and religion in the (geo) political structuring of the Orthodox spaces – I shall discuss, first, a famous geo/political theory which brings religion back into agenda: the theory of "the clash of civilisations" issued by Samuel Huntington. I shall evaluate this theory from the point of view of the Orthodox East, and I'll try to quantify its failures and analytical fallacies.

Second, somehow in reply, I will call upon an outlook attempting to unveil the peculiarity of the Orthodox area according to the criteria already mentioned - what Francois Thual used to call "the geopolitics of Orthodoxy", a theory which could get the status of *geopolitical paradigm*. The approach will be critical: I am going to show its shortcomings, and, consequently, I will extend its area of applicability.

Finally, my paper will illustrate the importance of this analytical framework, discussing three cases in which the relation national identity/religious identity proved to be important for the political and geopolitical map of the region: the case of Serbia - Montenegro; the case of Ukraine; and the case of Republic of Moldavia³.

Huntington facing the East of Europe. A failure and some question marks

As it appeared, 1996, the book of S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* was considered by Henry Kissinger - himself author of a famous *Diplomacy*, 1994 - as being "one of the most important workings appeared after the end of the cold war". Considering the stir created within the political circles or in the media, we unconditionally could agree with him.

It has been pushed far, with praises, as well as with critics; especially with these later ones⁴. What the Huntingtonian theory says, in fact⁵?

First, it is an attempt to explain the patterns of the international conflict and cooperation after the Cold War. The main idea is that the most important differences between peoples today are not political, ideological or economical ones; they are *cultural* ones.

Everywhere, people are defining their identity in terms of traditions, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify themselves with cultural groups: tribes, ethnical groups, religious communities, nations and, in the highest level, *civilisations*. This type of identification becomes today crucial, says Huntington. For centuries, there has existed within the Western civilization a system of multipolar states. Now, for the first time in human history, a global system of states operates as well as "multipolar and multi - civilizational". "The nation-states" will remain the main actors in world's dealings, but they

communist ideology had been a sort of *Weltanschauung* before 1989 is quite absurd. Even more, as polls and surveys show, the most religious sections of the Romanian population in the nineties are the young people and the oldest ones, that is the categories which had been the least contaminated by the communist ideology! (see: Dungaciu 2005).

³ In order to introduce "nation" into the geopolitical discourse there are already some notable attempts - see especially Lacoste 1997, but also Bonnura 1998. As far as "religion" is concerned, there are no notable endeavours, excepting Huntington or Thual.

⁴ The most cruel among them is maybe Stepan Chan's review, immediately after the book's issue in the prestigious *Millennium*, 1997, which attempted to be devastating: the work was a wreck, a "non-academical, parasite one", "some kind of fundamentalism, exactly alike the Iranian or Sudanese-type ones, which it holds for a scare-crow" (p. 139). Overflowing with aggressiveness - but also with simplifications, the text is a brand for a whole trend of the reactions stirred by the book worldwide. Astonished, Huntington will reply in the same number of - not without some reason: "S. Chan wrote a review for a book I didn't write..." (p. 141).

⁵ We are here referring to Huntington 1996.

will become subordinate: the orientation of their politics will get now new valences, its logic being far from that of the Cold War. A getting over is suggested, from the national interest to the cultural interest.

The countries which are similar from the cultural point of view will unite, thinks Huntington, as it will be much easier for them to understand and trust each other. Even the successes in the efforts made towards regional economic integration will evolve depending on the implied actors' degree of "common culture"⁶.

Concerning the validity of the "clash of civilizations" thesis - there is already a thesis: while in the 1993 article's heading there was a question mark ("The clash Civilizations?") in the heading of the 1996 volume the doubting disappears - I believe that only a staged lecture (a staged way of reading) might sanction or depicted it accurately. And only in this way we will seize the relevance of this perspective for our debate.

The first stage of the Huntington thesis, the foundation the whole book is built on, is the recovery of the *spiritual* (cultural) element in the geopolitical work. This idea of the *resurrection of the spiritual (cultural) dimension* in the contemporary world, despite / because the globalization processes we are witnessing at the same time, is set up by Samuel Huntington to operate in a new register, that one of geopolitical and international relations. *And this idea, I think, is the crucial merit of the work!*

The second stage of the analysis - that one which I am more interested in here - should be the way in which expresses itself, today, this undeniable resurrection; in other words, the actor taking over the trend which is at the basis of the theory.

And this actor, considers Huntington, is *civilization* - "religion is the main feature defining civilisations". The conflict *civilization - nation* is latent at this point - but Huntington suggests that the first one would overrun the second.

And here - let me anticipate this: when at stake is the so called "Orthodox civilization" -, someone could count the most spectacular failure of Huntington thesis. He began with the correct assumption of the religious resurrections, but he identified this resurrection at the *civilizational* level - which is definitely not the case, at least within the Orthodox space, despite Huntington's prediction of the orientation of the Orthodox countries towards the "core state" of civilization, namely Russia. Because this is wrong! What Huntington didn't understand is that the Orthodox resurrection brings with it a resurrection of the national identity as well: *the orthodox resurrection occurs within the national frames*. They go hand in hand, and they can not be separated... A national resurrection do not direct / oriented the Orthodox countries towards Moscow...

At this point, I shall approach a different geopolitical paradigm, namely, the "geopolitic of Orthodoxy"⁷.

⁶ The eight civilizations Huntington is identifying and debating on, are the following: the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latino-American, African (probably) ones.

⁷ The third level in quantifying Huntington's theory is closely linked to the previous one. It is dealing with the way of setting the borders of what is called by Huntington "civilization". This analytical level cumulated most of the critics - and not without reason. In Romania, for examples, there has been obsessively invoked the famous map of the Western (Catholic and Protestant) civilization - the boundary is passing along the Carpathians, ignoring the fact that the majority of the people from Transylvania are... Orthodox Christians! The map has already been present in the article from 1993 and recalled in the book at page 159. But "the problem of Transylvania" is almost inexistent in the work, the space conferred to Romania as such being not greater than that in the previous article (*Foreign Affaires*, 1993). Moreover, in order to understand the "attention" the American analyst is paying to the area it is worth observing that, on the map indicating "The world of civilizations after 1990", the Eastern border of the western civilization is coincident with...the western border of Romania. Different maps, different borders of the so called Western civilization! Nevertheless, this does not excuse the Huntington's enormity with respect to the first delimitation (from 1993), of the Western civilization - only it suggests a possible rooting in the lack of good sources in evaluating the area.

"The Geopolitic of Orthodoxy" under scrutiny. Methodological remarks

"The geopolitics of the Orthodoxy" is a phrase used for the first time as a title by the French scholar Francois Thual (not accidentally, probably, an Orthodox Christian as religious affiliation) (Thual 1994).

What says, in essence, this perspective? According to Thual, we are witnessing today a resurrection of the religious (spiritual) element all over the world - he neither quotes, nor does he discuss Huntington, but the idea is the same - and consequently, we are also attendant to an increase of the impact this element has in international relations. The geopolitical importance of the religious factor cannot be neglected anymore. Hence the heading of the work: *La geopolitique de l' Orthodoxie*. The Orthodox area is the space approached by the director of the "Institut de Relations Internationales et Strategiques", and the object of research is: "to show the way in which, during the last two centuries, the Orthodox churches have influenced and frame the diplomacy of international relations in the slave - Byzantine area, and, on the other hand, to illustrate how the states could lean on the religious ideologies in order to satisfy classical geopolitical ambitions" (Thual 1994:21).

The idea of Thual is that there is a peculiarity of the geopolitical evolutions in this area, whose hard core can be unfolded as follows: "...the interference of religion with geopolitics operates in a particular manner in this universe, the peculiarity of Orthodoxy consisting in the condition of symbiotically fusion of the national element and the religious one" (Thual 1994:125). Therefore, the geopolitics of Orthodoxy cannot ignore the national identity. The Orthodoxy, in Thual's vision, "is one of the main operators of the national construction". "The collective imagery" of these peoples is infused by the Orthodox Church, which becomes crucial factor in determining the geopolitical vision (actions, reactions) of these states and nations during history. According to Yves Lacoste, another French geopolitician, we could say that religion is for the Orthodox space - and not only - the crucial element of what he has called "*geopolitical representations*", suggesting that the image a social group is building up with respect to its *geopolitical condition* or that of its neighbours – *the geopolitical Other* (see Lacoste 1993: 1997).

Basically, in his 1994 book, Thual intended to warn us about the fact that in the structuring of this geopolitical representation, the religion might play a deciding part: "The geopolitics of the Orthodox world shows us that religion, as a source of the national ideology and of collective assessment, is one of the patterns of this geopolitical representation which, finally, is shaping the world" (Thual 1994:131). Beyond simplifications and strategical boldness aimed to illustrate the theory, Thual's outlook remains extremely useful, though, naturally, rather as "ideal type" in the sense of Max Weber, than a "mirroring" of actual reality.

But there is also a serious lack in this otherwise impressive construction. And the fundamental lack is that the French geopolitician didn't seize that *the relationship religion/national identity is not structuring only the external project of a state, but the inner one too*. In other words, this connection is able to structure or re-structure the political space *inside* the boundaries, which, in its turn, will influence the external performance of that particular state. We have here an inter-dependence impossible to be decrypted completely, but without which we will never understand the structuring of the internal or external (geo)political space in the Orthodox area⁸.

"Geopolitics of Orthodoxy" - as *internal* geopolitical paradigm

⁸ For others perspective on the some topic see Kitromilides 1990 or Roudometof 2001.

Concerning the *internal* project, the structuring of the *national* ethno-religious space is even more complex, because here the religious/national junction could generate surprising evolutions and outcomes.

I will not dealing here exhaustively with the Orthodox area, but some extremely significant episodes should be presented.

In essence, the theoretical scenario is the following. After 1989, the circumstances have been created after 1989 for political liberation and, at least theoretically, the possibility of full expression (ethnic, religious one etc.) of the minorities/majorities in this space. In these conditions, the action of a national state and of an Orthodox National Church which are trying, in a late process of "national building" to impose a single ethnic/religious identity in a multicultural / multi-religious society, could generate a counter-reaction of the communities which aim, in their turn, to preserve their respective ethnic and symbolical cultural identity. *And because these communities perceived and continue to perceive the official Orthodox Church as a state mechanism for national assimilation, they will begin to reject that very church, which they do not longer perceive in religious terms, though, theoretically, they are sharing a common religion, and to propose competing religious formulas.* The response attitudes and mechanisms differ from case to case, but two are, in essence, the strategies which can be detected in the area for the moment.

The first strategy is that of reactivation or founding of competing churches, even of the same religion. The aim is, explicitly or implicitly, to counteract the actions and interventions of a church which was perceived as non-legitimate from either religious (canonical) or ethnic point of view (as a foreign, imperialistic, church etc.). This strategy is most clearly exemplified in the cases of Ukraine and Republic of Moldavia (but also in Estonia) which will be dealt with below.

The case of Ukraine

The case of Ukraine is very interesting from this point of view. There are today three Orthodox Churches on the religious scene of the former soviet republic:

- the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of the Patriarchy of Moscow;
- the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of the Patriarchy of Kiev;
- the Ukrainian Self-Headed Orthodox Church and ten other church structures.

One of the reason is a *national* (ethnic) one – "Ukrainian" churches versus "Russian" churches -, because these Ukrainians churches are not even until now recognised canonically. Moreover, the Metropolitan Church of Kiev collaborates very well with the Greek-catholic Church in Ukraine, but *not* with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (canonically subordinated to Moscow) for reasons having nothing in common with ecclesiology or church laws⁹. The confrontations of the early 90's between the "East", the "Middle" and the "West" of Ukraine, which were about to torn this country in at least two parts, have had clear religious roots (regarding religious identity of the population).

In the same way can be explained the distribution of the votes at national or local elections or during various public initiatives of the Ukrainian authorities or civil society (for example, the creation of a Greek-Catholic Patriarchy in Lvov).

The Case of the Romanians / Vlachs of Serbia-Montenegro

The second of the strategies I mentioned belongs to those communities which cannot develop such an offensive strategy - either for the lack of a tradition of that kind or for the lack of political opportunities. But the reaction towards the official Church, perceived as mechanism

⁹ It is not the case to debate here if the relationship ethnic (national) identity/religious identity, out of question nowadays, is a modern or a before - modern one, "invented" or not etc.

for ethnic assimilation occurs anyway, though in disturbed formulas, defensive and/or reactive ones.

The most representative case is that one of the Romanian/Vlach population in the Serbian Timoc. Here, as a reaction to the Serbian Orthodox Church, perceived as a state mechanism for ethnical assimilation, a revival of religious rituals and traditions of eclectic formulas - pagans ones, pre-Christian etc. – occurs. These rituals have the “advantage” of being likely to be managed by the community in the maternal language, leaving aside the official state institutions.

The detailed analysis of the Romanian/Vlach population of Serbia-Montenegro has been already done (see Dungaciu, 2003). It is sufficient to say here that in Serbia-Montenegro there are two populations of Romanic origin. The one is living in Voievodina and is concentrated in the Serbian Banat and the other in the East of Serbia, in the Danube and Moravia areas in the Homolje Mountains and in the Timoc zone.

The first group is made of the Romanians of the Banat and the second one by the Romanian/Vlachs of the Timoc¹⁰. The Romanian/Vlachs of East Serbia live in 328 villages and 20 towns along the Danube valley from Veliko Gradiste in the mountains of the Timok-river in the Morava-valley (mostly east of Velika Morava, but also in some zones of the Western shore) in Homolje (in a large zone) and Timok Krajina.

In the East of Serbia, the Romanian/Vlachs enjoy the status of ethnical group, but their condition as a national minority is not recognized. Consequently, all constitutional and legal rights are denied to them and presently they are striving to get from the authorities this status, which would give them the legal basis for reaching a series of rights for education and information in their maternal language, official use of the language and the alphabet and the right to develop the national culture.

As far as their religious status is concerned, the situation is even more dramatic. Not being recognized as "national minority", the Romanian/Vlachs of the Eastern Serbia (mostly orthodox Christians) do not have the right to practice religion in their maternal language. The repeated interventions even at the Patriarch Pavle in person, in order to be granted the right of service in Romanian language, had no positive results for the moment.

And here lies the core of the issue.

First, this systematic blockade made by the Serbian state, materialised (also) in the interdiction for practising religion in one's own language (services and religious service, publications etc.) led to the perception of the Serbian orthodox Church in ethnic terms: as *mechanism of ethnical assimilation of the Romanians/Vlachs of this zone*.

Second, this perception has generated a rejection *even of the Christian religion as such* - impossible to be practiced when a church is “missing” - and hence a return to pagan, heathen and pre-Christian practices, which had also the advantage of not being “contaminated” with "Serb" or political practices issued by the state. This mechanism of de-Christianisation - not necessarily *secularization* - and of resurrection of some heathen (*synchretic*) or pre-Christian practices, which succeeds in modifying the religious image of a significant community, deserves a more attentive anthropological and sociological research.

The context needs, again, to be taken into account. There has not been even one single church to officiate religious service in Romanian language in the whole Timoc area for more

¹⁰ According to the population census of 1992, there were 42.311 Romanians in Serbia, 3.882 of these are living in Voievodina and the rest around Belgrade. They represent about 2% of the population of Voivodina. A major part of these (93%) are living in 11 towns, but are not the majority in neither of these towns: Alibunar, Vrsac, Bela Crkva, Zitiste, Plandiste, Kovacica, Kovin, Secanj, Pancevo, Zrenjanin and Novi Sad. The Romanians of Voivodina are speaking a Banatian variant of the Daco-Roman dialect (language). According to the data of the 2002 census, in Voivodina are living 30.419 Romanians, about 1,50% of the total population.

then 150 years in the. The religious service in Slavonic idiom has been imposed to the Romanian/Vlah Orthodox Christians - a formula that many of them refused. Coupled with the generalised secularization of the whole space - Serbia was and still is the most secular part of former Yugoslavia! - this evolution has generated progressively a moving away from the Christian religion, generally speaking. The performance of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been, in time, of such a nature, that the people in the zone considered it rather Serbian than Christian. Henceforth the reaction, even tacitly, against this institution they came to consider as a state mechanism for ethnical assimilation.

From Christian point of view, the situation is tragic. The people - the Romanian Bishop for Yugoslavia, Daniil observed - "have begun to move away from the Church". Refusing to accept to be spiritually assimilated, "people preferred the old proto-Christian, even pagan traditions – in this area the folklore is very rich. I understood that even the burials are performed, in many places, without a priest. I think there are also very many unbaptised and unmarried in church" (Dungaciu, 2003). This resurrection of the pre-Christian practices is culminating in structured and coherent rituals of burial, called "Petrecătura" a "funeral crying song" (ibidem).

An ambiguous location

The Case of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia

The Metropolitan Church of Basarabia was established in 1925 and functioned legally until 1944, with an interruption between 1940 and 1941. After 1944, under the Soviet regime, it could not perform its activity any longer. Shortly after the proclamation of the state independence of Republic of Moldova, the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia was reactivated on September 14, 1992. On November 19, 1992, the Romanian Patriarchy blessed the reactivation of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia, adopting a Synodal and Patriarchal Act. Starting with 1995, the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia has the superior rank of Exarchate to the Region with extraterritorial jurisdiction right upon the Romanian Orthodox Diaspora within the former soviet space and upon the Basarabian Diaspora from the entire world. The authorities of Chisinau have constantly thrown the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia outside the law, fact that led to the filing of some actions before the national court.

Thus, on June 3, 1998, the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia was obliged to submit a complaint against Republic of Moldova¹¹. The Government of Republic of Moldova objected the decision of CEDO requesting the resettlement of the case. On March 27, 2002, CEDO decided the rejection of the request of the Republic of Moldova Government, the decision of CEDO dated December 13, 2001 entering into force definitively¹². Subsequent to CEDO decision, *the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia was recognised and admitted in legality on July 30, 2002*.

The case of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia is different from many points of view from the Ukrainian one. Here the things are, canonically and historically speaking, entitled, and the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia - along with the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia which is under jurisdiction of Moscow - is recognised now and functions according to the canonical right of churches. Yet, the reactive ethnical / religious component was present

¹¹ On January 26, 1999, the request was registered with the European Court of Human Rights. By a decision dating June 7, 2001, the European Court of Human Rights declared the request of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia as admissible. The public hearings were held by CEDO at the Palace of Human Rights from Strasbourg on October 2, 2001. On December 13, 2001, CEDO unanimously decided that, by not recognising the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia, Republic of Moldova has broken the articles 9 and 13 of the European Convention of Human Rights. s

¹² The British Jurists Association designated the case of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia as one of the three important cases in the world during 2002.

in this case too¹³. Those who sustain the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia are those who support the cause of the Romanians on the other side of the Prut, as well as the most active elements from this point of view on the Moldavian political scene (people, groups, parties etc.). It would be enough to remind here that Vlad Cubreacov, the representative of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia in the trials this one has had, is vice-president of the Christian-Democratic party (PPCD)¹⁴, the party considered as "nationalist and unionist" at least by an important part of the society on both sides of the Prut.

It is not by accident that the electorate of the PPCD overlaps somehow with the "believing flock" of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia; and *vice versa*.

Conclusion and other questions mark

In the text, I have tried to suggest the following:

1. The existence of a so-called "Orthodox civilization" within or outside UE, and "the Russian Orthodox Church" as its "pre-eminent political voice" is an unsustainable idea;
2. there is a correlation between processes considered to often as distinct: *nationalism* (national politics) and the religious resurrections or even *secularization* (more exactly *de-Christianisation*¹⁵) in some Orthodox spaces.
3. The *sociological* analysis – including sociology of religion - of the South Eastern Europe can not be developing / caring out ignoring the role played by the national state in the Orthodox area. The main reason is the relationship between religion and ethnicity in this region. Due to the complicated (sometimes dangerous) mixture between these two elements, the national state influenced, explicitly or implicitly, the religious attitude or beliefs of people. Even the process of de-Christianisation could be due - as an unintended consequence, sometimes - to the intervention of an Orthodox Christian church refusing the right to an Orthodox community (ethnic different) to manifest itself religiously. The researched case presented here was that one of the Romanian/Vlach population in Serbia.
4. The *geopolitical* analysis of the Orthodox East cannot be performed ignoring the relation between the nation (*national identity*) and Orthodoxy. The relation between the national/religious identity in the Orthodox area is unique and needs adequate analytical tools or methodologies.
5. "The geopolitics of Orthodoxy" - at the *internal* level as well as at the *external* one - helps us to depict more rigorously the present and the future of this area. Yesterday this "*Eastern connection*" proved to be effective in Estonia, Moldavia, Ukraine, Serbia etc., today in Macedonia and tomorrow, maybe, in Montenegro...

¹³ There doesn't exist, regretfully, a competent and complete study on what has happened in the Republic of Moldavia from this point of view (for the chronological marks of this evolution can be fruitfully consulted the work issued by the Romanian Patriarchy in 1993, "The Truth about the Metropolitan Church in Basarabia"). The ethnical-religious dimensions of the phenomenon have either been hidden or simplified up to caricature. Moreover, a contextual, *synchronic* analysis, respectively one able to set this evolution onto the background of the political registered after the fall of the communist regime is still missing.

¹⁴ It was known the fact that the Vlad Cubreacov, one of the leaders of PPCD, was kidnapped for more than 2 months in 2002, by unknown persons, him being the main co-author of the documents according to which the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia has achieved the recognition by CEDO of its rights.

¹⁵ For a discussion related to this phenomenon see Baechler 1992.

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