

# A PERSPECTIVE OVER RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DECISIONS IN ROMANIA AFTER 1989

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## ABSTRACT

*One of the greatest Romanian 'organization' that has the highest roots in history than any others, Romanian Orthodox Church, provided many actions for the political and economic lives, but also improved and developed different and new strategies for a better management to a high level. During the past twenty years, the decisions taken in the religious area had a huge impact over the political arena, even if it was wide open or out of see actions. The European Union and the enlargement were seen also like political and economic strategies, but in fact it was just another objective that the Church had to accomplish.*

**KEYWORDS:** decisions, management, religion, policy, economic.

After too many years of communism, restrictions and oppression, many Romanians adopted a psychology of resignation and found different ways of accommodating themselves within the new regime. Following the 1989 political change in Romania, religious life was liberalized throughout the country: article 29 of the 1991 Constitution of Romania expressly guarantees the freedom of religious belief and the complete autonomy of legally established religious cults; on this basis the Romanian government has recognized and provided material assistance to 15 religions cults. Even so, the lack of an adequate legal support forced different religious cults to face a great competition for material resources and political influence, which often placed them on a collision course.

During the Ceausescu's dictatorship, the church was tolerated partly because it was seen as a useful national tool. Heavy controls, infiltrations and a firm grip were held, though the churches remained open and well attended. The Orthodox Church was allowed to retain seminaries and centres of biblical and theological studies. The only places subjected to restrictions were the monasteries, in part because they were considered residences of religious dissent.

In the words of the late Patriarch Teoctist of Romania, "the history of the Romanian people is intertwined with the history of the Orthodox Church, the only institution which has lasted since the birth of the Romanian people." Indeed, far from extenuating in importance, religious nationalism acquired new forms of expression in a post-communist milieu. Religious nationalism explains in part the importance of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the field of religion and politics after the fall of Communism. Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu elucidate how nationalism and specifically religious nationalism is "there to stay as a sentiment strongly shared by large segments of the population."

Under communism, religion was officially viewed as a personal matter, and relatively few restrictions were placed upon it (compared with those imposed by other communist regimes), although the government made efforts to undermine religious teachings and faith in favour of science and empiricism.

But equally important was the absence of strong reformist wings within the Romanian Communist Party that, in turn, made elite pacts or settlements impossible. The transition to an open society in Romania was initiated not through negotiations, as it was in Poland or Hungary, but through the sudden collapse of the regime, which led to no institutional arrangements in place capable of providing channels for collective action and bargaining in an uncertain and highly volatile environment.

As Romania became a democracy, the Church was freed from state control, but the state still provides funding for the church and pays the salaries of the clergy.

The lack of pacts and negotiations before 1989 could account for the rhetoric of intransigence and the winner-take-all mentality of the main political actors that emerged after 1989, which delayed the consolidation of the new democratic regime.

The 1992 census indicates that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe: 99% Christians, 86, 67% of the population declared itself Christian Orthodox, 0, 04% atheists. The same situation has been registered in 2002: 99% Christians, 86, 81% Christian Orthodox, 0, 05% atheists. The level of confidence in the Orthodox Church has been constantly high – 70-90%,

The first year of the transition was marked by an increased polarization and radicalization of the population. The perception of most political actors was that an all-or-nothing approach was preferable to a more accommodating stance. The rapid proliferation of political parties after December 1989 brought weak pluralism that was not conducive to genuine political competition. The new political parties had weak constituencies, little grass-roots support and lacked well-defined doctrines and internal discipline.

The overall political upheaval and religious reorganization has challenged the established privileged status of the Romanian. In reaction, the Orthodox leadership tried to prevent an imminent crisis of their church by consolidating its political influence, finally attempting to exploit its old political ties, and take advantage of its status of a dominant church, in a country in which 87 % of the inhabitants have declared themselves Orthodox believers.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has decided to initiate a comprehensive program of spiritual pre-eminence in society: numerous churches and monasteries have been built and throughout the country; the theological educational system has been consolidated, and religion has been reintroduced as a subject in schools.

Even if there were taken these measures, the Orthodox Church has experienced nevertheless a period of great insecurity for a variety of reasons.

In 1994 the Holy Synod decided to modify the Status of the Romanian Orthodox Church to unilaterally proclaim the Orthodox Church as « *national*, autocephalous and unitary in its organization » (art. 2), as a reaction to the political decisions from the new Romanian Constitution where it was not stipulate parliamentary representation for the ecclesiastical leadership and also the Orthodox Church was not nominate as the dominant church of the country, proclaiming instead the equality of religious cults.

By the end of 1996, it became clear that the policies carried out led to the coexistence of healthy and sick institutions that explain the country's muddling through the transition. The President and his government enjoyed considerable tutelary powers; they attempted to exercise broad oversight of all major political decisions, while rejecting in practice some of the principles of constitutionalism.

The delay in economic reforms can be explained by the lack of coherence of the government's agenda that was affected by constant bickering among coalition members, which often led to confusion and inability to implement radical reforms. Once again, the lack of a tradition of political accommodation and compromise took a heavy toll. Other problems surfaced when, for example, the reform of the banking system went ahead, but industrial restructuring lagged behind. Strengthening the independence of judiciary also

proved to be an impossible task. Moreover, despite the widely publicized campaign against corruption and the misuse of public funds for private enrichment, the results were less than satisfactory.

The religious clash had a great impact on Romanian foreign policy, as well. Beginning in 1994, Romania intensified its campaign for integration into NATO. Trying to secure valuable diplomatic support from the Vatican State, the Romanian government re-established its diplomatic representation in Vatican, while the former Romanian president Ion Iliescu extended in a short period of time three consecutive official invitations to Pope John Paul II to visit Romania.

The inter-confessional conflict hindered many of these efforts. In several occasions, the Pope specifically addressed the issue of Greek-Catholic patrimony retrocession, appealing to the Romanian government for a favourable resolution to the matter. In reaction, the dominant Romanian Orthodox Church has constantly refused to endorse a visit of the Pope in Romania, conditioning it by a preliminary reconciliation of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches.

If the Catholic Church leadership campaigned for a more determined Western orientation of Romania's policy, the Orthodox leadership has regularly taken conservative stances in major social-political issues, a fact which led some analysts to go so far as to appreciate that the Orthodox Church has launched a battle against the West. For instance, the Orthodox Church vigorously opposed the legalization of homosexuality in Romania - in spite of the fact that any delay in the harmonization of Romanian legislation with the European standard would unavoidable hinder Romania's potential integration into the European Union. Later, the ROC strongly opposed any collaboration between Romania and NATO in implementing a military solution in the Kosovo crisis against Yugoslavia. Far from being a simple demonstration of Orthodox solidarity, the gesture was suspect of expressing also a political option of the ROC. In this way, in their conflict, Orthodox and Greek Catholic theologians took sides in the continuous ideological debate between *Westernizers*, *Indigenes* and *pro-Orientalists*, an issue which has monopolized the Romanian socio-political and cultural disputes in the modern period.

On mid-April 1998, Orthodox Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania called for a direct interference of the Church on the political scene. In his opinion, the Church needed to become a major factor of moral orientation within political life, mainly by recommending a certain political party to the electorate. Although according to the status of the ROC, such a decision could be taken only by the Holy Synod of the ROC, it was nevertheless telling that Anania's proposal was soon backed by many Orthodox prelates. Their controversial declarations stirred fierce debates in Romanian society, first and foremost because they contradicted the Constitution of Romania.

Ultimately, the visit of the Pope John Paul II in Romania, which occurred in May 7-9, 1999, was a major political success for the Orthodox Church. Through strained negotiation, the Romanian Orthodox leadership prevented a visit of the Pope in Transylvania. In this way, while reducing the religious significance of the Pope's visit for the rival Greek-Catholic Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church could exploit fully the political benefits of the event. The visit of the Pope consecrated the reconciliation between the Greek-Catholic and the Orthodox Churches: in a third bilateral meeting at Rimet, in June 14, 1999, the Greek-Catholic Church has limited her request to 160 churches and 70 religious edifices. It was suggested a decisive emancipation of the Romanian Orthodox Church from the political influence of Moscow, increasing thus its domestic and international prestige. On a more general level, the first visit of a Pope in a preponderant Orthodox country was meant to signal an epoch of renewed confessional dialogue between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. In the midst of the Kosovo crisis, the Pope and the Patriarch

appealed for an end to the war and the implementation of a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

In May 1999, invoking their contribution to achieving the much-desired religious reconciliation, Romanian President Emil Constantinescu decorated the leaders of the Romanian Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches, namely the Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist and the Greek-Catholic Cardinal Alexandru Todea, in a gesture meant to symbolize a restored collaboration between the Church and the political power. In this way, while politicians, journalists, political analysts and high prelates were reacting to Anania's statement, it became more and more evident that the proposal was in fact the tip of the iceberg: we were actually facing a veritable political offensive of the ROC, aimed at questioning the existing legally established relationship between church and state. This state-church crisis was also a serious warning for a potential alliance between nationalist parties and a frustrated ecclesiastical leadership.

The government under the leadership of Adrian Nastase proposed an ambitious agenda that included not only structural economic reform, but also major changes in other equally important areas. One of these areas was constitutional reform.

In 2003, Romanian citizens approved revisions to the 1991 Constitution, which were meant to bring the nation's fundamental legal structure into harmony with EU requirements.

The amplification of basic human rights, the expansion of property rights and the development of mechanisms for judicial review were among the key provisions of the new amendments. The constitutional amendments also guarantee the freedom to establish business operations. Article 41 of the Constitution regarding property rights was amended to guarantee such rights to all individuals. Under the new amendments, foreigners and stateless persons are granted the right to acquire title to land in Romania subject only to the terms and conditions of the treaty regarding Romania's adhesion to the EU and other treaties to which Romania is a party, and subject to conditions of reciprocity. Public office is guaranteed to be open to all Romanian citizens residing in the country with a guarantee of equal opportunity for men and women.

Also, EU citizens may vote and be elected as representatives of local public administrations, subject to the fulfilment of the requirements set forth by organic law.

But even after Romania had gained independence, foreign interests continued to dominate the economy. Large tracts of the best grain-growing areas were controlled by absentee landlords, who exported the grain and took the profits out of the country. Outsiders controlled most of the few industries, and non-Romanian ethnic groups--particularly Germans, Hungarians, and Jews-- dominated domestic trade and finance. The centuries of outside control of the economy engendered in the Romanian people an extreme xenophobia and longing for self-sufficiency--sentiments that would be exploited repeatedly by the nation's leaders throughout the twentieth century.

But Romania's accession to the EU has not always been an issue without reservations. The Bavarian Minister Emilia Müller (2006) welcomed the decision to integrate Romania into the European Union but also emphasized that the accession of new member state should not cause negative externalities for other member state. Likewise, EU accession negotiations with Romania were much stricter than with formerly acceded member states and higher hurdles had to be taken before accession in 2007. The motives were not always based on calm assessments, only. Sometimes the European Parliament rather used the accession issue to deal with internal conflicts.

On the other hand, Romania did few effective efforts so far in communicating its progresses to a broader public. Hence, even scientific literature was sometimes surprised to find "Romanian institutions ... better than could be expected". The huge gap between the widespread image and Romanian realities is frequently reflected in surveys, which

investigate the opinion of investors that already do business in Romania on the one side and potential investors on the other side (cf. e.g. Ernst & Young 2008).

Then again, not only Western Europeans but also Romanians have some reservations towards the immediate effects of enlargement. Though the European Union is widely positive associated (Eurobarometrul 2007: 25) and an extraordinary large share of interviewees wishes enlargement, most people seem to know, that they will have to face also hard times. While interviewees who think that enlargement will worsen their situation admit that it will be better after some years, those who expect mainly a bettering from enlargement are conscious that it will last some years until the positive effects will manifest (cf. Eurobarometrul Rural 2005: 28f.).

Economists recently have begun to turn back to their roots in two areas: the study of the economic dimensions of religion and the exploration of human happiness.

Economists have tended to focus on whether income or wealth produce greater happiness and their literature on religion, while diffuse, has tended to stress the potential material advantage of religious practice in reducing delinquent and criminal activity. It was not always so. Adam Smith noted that religion prepares people "for another and better world to come".

Economic transition lowered happiness on average, but did not affect all equally. Religious involvement contributes positively to individuals' self-reported well-being. Controlling for personal characteristics of the respondents, money is a less important source of happiness for the religious. The impact of economic transition has varied greatly across different groups. The main winners from increasing economic freedom were the entrepreneurs. The religious were little affected by the changes. This implies that greater ideological freedom, measured by a greater social role of churches, may not influence happiness per se.

During the past few years, empirical economic growth modelling has emerged by constructing and testing numerous model and explanatory variable alternatives. One of the most promising recent ideas consists that also religious aspects should be included as explanatory variables into economic growth models, therefore capturing influences of culture, moral and ethics.

Moral institutions and ethics affect the economic development, as for example, trust and honesty are essential requirements for emerging economic activity. Religious activities and beliefs are documented over a long time period in many Western economies, making quantitative empirical time series data available.

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