

THE GEOPOLITICS OF ORTHODOXY AND THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS RESURRECTIONS IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE - the case of Serbia-Montenegro, Ukraine and Republic of Moldavia -

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Religious pluralism usually means that in a given society there is more than one religious tradition and more than a single, unchallenged worldview of the supernatural. There are many divergent views, so that one can choose freely between a religious interpretation or another, and rival interpretations (or religions) and organisations (churches) compete in the marketplace of religions. The role of state in this picture is passive. In modern, religiously pluralistic societies, religions can play vital roles as sources of meaning for their adherents, but the state or the government should neither force people into sectarian religious observances nor favour some religions over others nor punish people for their religiosity without a very strong reason other than prejudice. This is a typical Western scenario. I will argue that the situation is different in South Eastern Europe, and a 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. To prove this, I shall focus on the Serbian Vlach population. They live in East Serbia, in the valleys of the Danube and the Morava, in the Homolje Mountains and Timok Area. They speak „Romanian" or „Walachian", but their status of national minority is not recognised. As a consequence, they are denied all rights: constitutional and legal rights to education in their mother tongue, official use of their language and alphabet, information in their language, national culture etc. They cannot even practice religion in their own language. The Vlachs in Eastern Serbia, who belong to Eastern Orthodoxy, do not have the possibility to attend religious services in Romanian (or „Walachian" language). And because they have perceived the Serbian Orthodox Church as a state-mechanism for assimilation, the Vlachs began to reject Christian religion as such and resurrect old pagan pre-Christian ! - religious behaviours and practices. This mechanism of de-Christianization and resurrection of pagan religion - a state mechanism, which manages to change the religious landscape of a society - deserves a closer sociological investigation.

Preamble

The international news-agencies have recently presented the case of a Christian Orthodox priest of 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 very priest has been received with obvious irritation by the community: "he sold himself to the Greeks", "man of the

Serbian", "Greek - Serbian conspiracy" - were only some of the accusations shouted out by the believing flock. The reason is obvious: Now, when the Orthodox Church of Macedonia attempts to unbind itself, canonically, from the Serbian Orthodox Church and to become completely self-governing (*autocephalous*), an attitude like the afore-mentioned one is only profitable to those who are fighting such an attempt. On the one side, of course, the Serbians, on the other, 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 (moreover, 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 scenario, the text below is trying to unveil the political and geopolitical space in South Eastern Europe, taking into account two elements which had been very little recalled of when addressing issues of the kind: i.e. religion and national identity. The outlook on these elements, shown by most of the (geo) political analysts joining this issue, is strange. They are simply ignored, as if they wouldn't exist, or rather like not being able to realize that almost the whole mental, and here from, actional pattern of these populations was directly or indirectly rotating around such items.

Everything happens as if no one would like to improve the gap which is to often separating the addresses about Eastern Europe and the Eastern Reality as such addresses. In a technical language, this discrepancy is called, so Edward Said, "orientalism".

Only that, in this very case, the authors of this gap are not selected only among the Occidentals, too often in too great a hurry to get - too fast over a space they don't really understand or in which they are not interested quite to the end - but even by the local analyst.

There is the hilarious form of an "ab - original orientalism", the terrifying sign of the Eastern elite detachment from its own space of action and manoeuvre. Not even the trial - rather shy, as well - of the most subtle of the attempts to revive the security studies - and we are here referring to what is usually called "The School of Copenhagen" - endeavouring to take into account religion and nation as referent objects, - had any notable effect from this point of view (see Buzan 1998:53, 123 - 124) (1).

There are, surely, exceptions as well, and we will quote them by their time. In order to better point out the theme of this text - i.e. the importance of the nation and religion in the (geo) political structuring of the Orthodox spaces - we will go out from referring to the most famous geopolitical theory which sets religion in the forefront, and viewing it from the Orthodox East - we will try to quantify its failures and analytical noxes: the theory of "the clash of civilisations" issued by Samuel Huntington.

Somehow in reply, we will call upon an outlook attempting to unveil the peculiarity of the Orthodox zone, with respect to the criteria referred to: there is

about what Francois Thual used to call "the geopolitics of Orthodoxy", onto which we will confer the status of geopolitical paradigm and, showing its shortcomings, we will extend its area of applicability. Finally, we will illustrate its theoretical impact, discussing three cases in which the relation national identity/religious identity unfolds highly: the case of Serbia - Montenegro; of the Ukraine; and that of the Republic of Moldavia¹.

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 and journalistic circles or in the media of the analysts for global politics, we unconditionally should call him right.

It has been pushed far, as well with praises, as with critics. Especially with these later ones². What says, in essence, the Huntingtonian theory³? In the first place, it is an analysis and 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 Occidental 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 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.

¹ If for introducing "the nation" into the geopolitical wordings there already were some notable attempts - see especially Lacoste 1997, but also Bonnura 1998 - for quoting "religion" in this type of addresses there were no notable endeavouring, excepting Huntington or Thual.

² 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).

³ We are here referring to Huntington 1996.

The countries which are similar from the cultural point of view will unite, deems the analyst, 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"⁴.

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 - we believe that only a staged lecture (a staged way of reading), ordered to unfold on three stages, might sanction it. And only this way we will seize the relevance of the 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 wording. This idea of the *resurrection of the spiritual (cultural) dimension* in the contemporary world, despite the globalization processes we are watching at the same time, is set up by Samuel Huntington to operate in a new register, that one of geopolitical radiographies. And this idea, I think, is the crucial merit of the work!

The second stage of the analysis - that one which we are mainly 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. Though not being the only one, "religion is the main feature defining civilisations". The conflict civilization-nation is latest at this point, as Huntington supposed that the first one would overrun the second one.

And here, as well will see, is the most spectacularly wrong, as Huntington failed in his analysis at least in matters concerning the analysis of "the Orthodox civilization". He went out from the correct assumption of the religious resurrections, but he identified this resurrection at a civilizational level - which is not the case, at least within the Orthodox space, despite Huntington's prediction of the orientation of the Orthodox countries towards the "core state" - as he calls it - of civilization, namely Russia. Wrong! What Huntington didn't understand is that the Orthodox resurrection brings with it: *the orthodox resurrection occurs within the national frames*.

We are now in another geopolitical paradigm, different of the Huntington one at this point, namely, "geopolitic of Orthodoxy".

⁴ The eight civilizations Huntington is identifying and debating on, are the following: the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latino-American, African (probably) ones.

"The Geopolitic of Orthodoxy" under scrutiny. Methodological remarks

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

What says, in essence, this analysis? According to Thual, we are witnessing nowadays a resurrection of the religious (spiritual) factor 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 same factor has in international relations. The geopolitical importance of the religious factor cannot be neglected anymore. Hence the heading of the work, since the Orthodoxy is the space the analysis made by the director of the "Institut de Relations Internationales et Strategiques" is focussing on, and the object of research is: "to show the way in which, during the last two centuries, the Orthodox churches have influenced and branded 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 zone, 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, as the Orthodoxy, in Thual's vision, "is one of the main operators of the national construction". "The collective imaging" of these peoples is infused by the Orthodox Church, crucial factor in determining the geopolitical vector (actions, reactions) of these states and nations during history. If it would be to call upon another famous geopolitician, Yves Lacoste, we would say that religion is for the orthodox space - and not only - the crucial element in what he has called "geopolitical representations", respectively the image a social group is building up with respect to its geopolitical condition or that of its neighbours (see Lacoste 1993: 1997).

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)⁵.

⁵ The third level in quantifying Huntington's theory - but which we are here not interested in - is closely linked to the previous one and is dealing with the way of setting the borders of what is called by Huntington "civilization". This analytical level is that particular one which cumulated most of the critics - and not without reason. In Romania, for examples, there has been obsessively invoked the

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 the fact the French geopolitician didn't seize is that *the relationship religion/national identity is not structuring only the external project of a state, but the inner one too*, performing respectively the structuring of the logistical space *inside* the frontiers, which, in its turn, will influence the external performance of that respective state. We have here interdependence impossible to foretell up to the end, but without which we will never understand the structuring of the geopolitical space in the Orthodox area⁶.

"Geopolitics of Orthodoxy" - as internal geopolitical paradigm

Concerning the internal project, the structuring of the ethno-religious space is even more complex, because here the religious/national junction has generated surprising evolutions. We will not deal exhaustively, from this point of view, with the orthodox area, but some extremely significant sequences should be presented here.

In essence, the theoretical scenario is the following: under the circumstances created after 1989 – political delivery and, at least theoretically, also the possibility of full expression (ethnical, religious one etc.) of the minorities in this space – the action of a national state (and of an Orthodox National Church) which is trying, in a late process of "national building" to impose a single ethnical/national identity in a society which was diverse from this point of view, could generate, in counter-reaction, an action in reply of the communities which aim, in their turn, to preserve their respective ethnical and symbolical cultural identity. *And as these ones 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 zone for the moment.

famous map with the eastern border of the occidental (Catholic and Protestant) civilization - which is passing, so Huntington, along the Carpathians - already present within the article and recalled in the book at page 159. But "the stake of Transylvania" is almost inexistent in the work, the space conferred to Romania 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 zone 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. Nevertheless, this does not excuse the Huntington's enormity with respect to the first delimitation, of 1993, of the occidental civilization - and the replies given in Romania have been welcome - only it suggests a possible rooting also in a gross lack of competence in evaluating the zone or in the use of obsolete, inadequate sources.

⁶ For an outlook – more and more attractive in Balkan historiography - which is appointing this relation only in the XIX century, see Kitromilides 1990 or Roudometof 2001.

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

Case of Ukraine

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

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

The reasons are, among others, mainly *national* (ethnical) ones, because these churches are not even until new 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 (which is canonically subordinated to Moscow) for reasons having nothing in common with ecclesiology or church official right⁷. The confrontations of the early 90's between the "East", the "Middle" and the "West" of Ukraine, which were about to tear 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 Metropolitan Church of Basarabia

The case of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia – being under canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchy of Bucharest since its reactivation on the December 19th, 1992 – is different from many points of view. 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 and functions according to the right of churches. Yet, the reactive ethnical – religious component was present in this

⁷ It is not the case to debate here if the relationship ethnical (national) identity/religious identity, out of question nowadays, is a modern or a before - modern one, "invented" or not etc.

case too⁸. 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 (persons, groups, parties etc.). They are also in the front line in the case of reactivation the Metropolitan Church which was under jurisdiction of Bucharest. (It would be enough to remind here that Vlad Cubreacov, the representative of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia in the inner and international trials this one has had, is vice-president of the Christian-Democratic party (PPCD), 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 is identical with those who "choose" the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia).

The Case of the Romanians/Vlachs of Serbia-Montenegro

The second of the strategies we were quoting at the beginning 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 assimilating from the ethnical point of view, shows up, though in disturbed formulas, defensive and/or reactive ones.

The most representative case is that one of the Romanian/Vlachian population of the Serbian Timoc. Here, as a reaction to the Serbian Orthodox Church, perceived as a state mechanism for ethnical assimilation, we attend presently a revival of religious rituals and traditions of eclectic formulas - pagans ones, pre-Christian etc. - but which 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 performed some other part (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.

⁸ 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.

The first group is made of the Romanians of the Banat and the second one by the Romanian/Vlachs of the Timoc⁹. 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 question this text is aiming to point out. In the first place, 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 the Serbian orthodox Church being perceived as *mechanism of ethnical assimilation of the Romanians/Vlachs of this zone*.

In the second place, this perception has generated a rejection even of the Christian religion as such - impossible to practice when a church is "missing" - and hence a return to heathen and pre-Christian practices, which had also the advantage of not being contaminated with "Serbians" or political practices issued by the political instances of the state. This mechanism of de-Christianisation - not necessarily of secularization - and of resurrection of some heathen (*syncretic*) 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 then 150 years in the. The religious service in

⁹ According to the population census of 1992, there were 42.311 Romanians in Serbia, 3.882 of these are living in Voivodina 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.

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 "The Passing off" (ibidem).

Conclusion and other questions mark

In the text, we have tried to suggest the possible correlations (links) between processes having been and being considered, too often, as being disjoint: the nationalism (national politics, respectively the ignoring of the different ethnical identities and consequently ignoring of their rights) and the religious resurrections or even secularization (more exactly *de-Christianisation*¹⁰) in some orthodox spaces. We have tried an argumentation for:

1. The relation between the national/religious identity in the orthodox space is unique and needs research instruments having to go beyond the endeavours being in this moment (in use). One of the methodological instruments could be the so-called "geopolitics of Orthodoxy", as an *external*, but also *internal* paradigm.
2. The role played by the national state in the Orthodox area is crucial. Even the process of de-Christianisation could be due - as an unintended consequence - to the intervention of an Orthodox, Christian church, which is refusing the right to an Orthodox community to manifest itself religiously *for the sole reason of not sharing the same ethnical identity*. The researched case was that one of the Romanian/Vlachs population of the north-east of Serbia.
3. The geopolitical analysis of the Orthodox East cannot be performed ignoring the relation which exists between the nation (the national identity)

¹⁰ For a discussion related to this phenomenon see Baechler 1992.

and Orthodoxy (the religion of the self heading). "The geopolitics of Orthodoxy", as well in the *external*, as in the *interval* "field", helps us to unveil more rigorously the present and the future of this space. Yesterday in Estonia, Moldavia, Ukraine, Serbia etc., today in Macedonia and tomorrow, maybe, in Montenegro.

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