

ROMANIAN COMMUNISM – A FAILED MODERNIZATION ATTEMPT

Dumitru Bortun*

bortund@yahoo.com

*Salazar was not an alien,
he is a part of the Portuguese soul and until
we find the meaning of his role in our history,
we, Portuguese, will never know who we are for real.'*

Fernando Dacosta

Abstract: *The fundamental contraction of contemporary Romanian society is the contradiction between goals and means; the objectives of the current historical phase are modern, while the means through which we would like to reach them are pre-modern.*

Even if a century and a half already passed from the beginning of the modernization process, Romanian society has not managed to complete this project. Feudalism is still governing our way of perceiving ourselves and the others, the way we think and live, the way we make decision and act. Unfortunately, the analysis of the contemporary Romanian society put our historical delay on account of the 'communist fracture'.

In our vision, Romanian communism has not been a cause but rather an expression of our historical retardation (through the way in which it began, functioned and legitimated) and Ceausism has been less a manifestation of communism and rather a manifestation of Romanianness – as type of civilization, as type of culture and as type of identity discourse.

Romanian communism was a failed modernization attempt simply because it has been conceived in the pre-modern paradigm, in terms of a simple, peasant society, opaque to the occidental modernity values and with a tacit aversion toward change, communication, rationalization.

Ceausism was the most backward expression of Stalinism at European level: the peasant communism. It was the empirical-observable expression of the synthesis between Stalinism and the national tradition. The authors of Tismaneanu Report neglected this aspect, overwhelmed by their intention to de-legitimize communism and to display it as an item for import. With this non-critical and politicized report, we have missed yet another chance to honestly answer the question: 'Who are we?'.

This paper aims at answering this question, by studying Romanian communism from the perspective of the modernity values.

Keywords: *tradition, modernization, Romanianness, peasant communism, values of modernity.*

* Senior lecturer Ph.D - *Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest.*

Ever since the publication of the Presidential Committee Report for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship¹, I felt somehow obliged to come out with a reply. The report has many merits, but is encumbered by a fundamental flaw: it fails to supply an honest analysis of the *Romanian type of civilization* – the only analysis that would give us a chance to never live through the misery we experienced during the Ceausescu regime. From my perspective, Romanian communism has been the cross product of a certain type of „communism” (Stalinism) and of a certain type of civilization that I conventionally name „Romanianness”. Stalinism has been thoroughly studied and it is well known, but the „Romanianness” that triggered the particularity of the Romanian communism has not yet been systematically studied and stills remains a „terra incognita” for those wanting to understand today’s Romanian society. Through almost all our manifestations we are so dependent on the past that I might as well believe that the main cause of the perpetuation of this misery – material and human – is not so much the „communism” but the „Romanianness”. In other words, the unknown factor in our equation!

The attacks against the Tismaneanu Committee Report have not failed to appear; they even hit the surface during the presentation of the Report by the President of Romania before the reunited chambers of the Parliament (December the 18th 2006). But they made no reference to the absence of a critical approach of “Romanianness” that made Ceausism possible. Most of them touched upon certain precise aspects, while the most virulent ones indicted exactly the fact that the contribution of the foreign factor(!) has not been sufficiently pinpointed.

The large majority of the public intellectuals (those expressing their opinion in public) ascribe the perpetuation of the misery to the legacy of the ‘communist regime’, a regime enforced from the ‘outside’. As far as I’m concerned, this means an overvaluation of the foreign factor but also of the political regime during the 1945-1989 period, named ‘communism’, a hilarious overestimation of the impact of this regime on the interpersonal relations, on the day to day life, mentalities and private behaviors. It is as if we would admit that the ultimate purpose of the ‘political-ideological and cultural educative activities of the Romanian Communist Party’ – *the making of the new man, endowed with an elevated socialist consciousness* – has been accomplished. The democratic institutions cannot function since they run against the existence of the ‘new man’ created by the communists! We are obviously dealing with a mystification. This is why nobody reads it out explicitly, almost all analyses (and I mean all) tacitly surmise it, as an axiom.

Reviewing the past of the Romanian society, we relate to two types of past; *the recent past* (in this case, the communist regime) or *the long term past* (in this case, at least the last two centuries, that is at least the period in which the temptation of modernization took shape). The former is much more comfortable, morally speaking, since it involves no self-criticism of the Romanian civilization and culture, which would comprise a self-criticism of the elites as well. Finding the

¹ *** *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport final*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2007.

roots of the disaster on the outside ('soviet tanks') and blaming the dead ('the communist regime') is simpler and more comfortable. The latter is more difficult from a mental perspective – since it entails a critical and independent reasoning, as well as from a psychological perspective – because it means to direct the scalpel towards oneself refusing at the same time any anesthetic. And this is exactly what our intellectual elite are unable to do.

If we miss this opportunity of coming to know *how* we are and *who* we are, we might miss our last historic opportunity. If things evolve as they do today, I'm afraid that on the outbreak of the next social-political disaster the national particularity shall not apply as scientific explanation.

1. Tradition and historical change

Romanian democracy can only grow on new economic, social and cultural bedrock. Driven by ignorance or superficiality, we run the risk of trying to build on the old foundation, believing that changing the ground floor (economic relations), the floor (social structure) and the attic (institutional and ideological superstructure) or restoring the façade (rhetoric of the public discourse) will suffice. But the general evil, the one setting off the phenomena noticeable at visitable and visible levels of the societal system, resides in the 'technical underground' of the construction which is rarely visited and only by specialized persons (more or less competent, but *specialized!*). It is here that we find the representations and the symbols, the values and the attitudes, the norms and the rites that most of us share – that majority that forms the critical mass of the Romanian society and which sets the pace of the economic and social progress, the purposes of the institutions and the type of successful ideologies.

This is why the analytical discovery of the foundation on which the totalitarian regime appeared and developed may help us shape the base of the Romanian democracy. It is an extremely difficult task due to the fact that the old foundations are not and have never been outside us, they have always been within us. The construction we refer to is not an uninhabited one, we are its inhabitants! The worst we could do would be to deceive ourselves that we've just landed on the roof, as innocent as a lamb, and that we can set to work from bottom up, without visiting the underground or question the foundation. As if on the foundation of a prison we could build an Agora!

We naturally ask ourselves: 'How new must the foundations be?' Meditation on this matter pops another question: 'How far should we go with the critical analysis of our own past?' Should it be true that any society is the synthesis of its history, then the only way to disembarass ourselves of the curse of the historical-natural continuity is the critical analysis of the past that establishes a lucid and courageous political stand, capable of giving up the unfruitful past and keep the fruitful one that we could successfully use in solving today's issues and reaching tomorrow's goals. Only such action, infiltrated by the 'meanness' of the analytical spirit, could evade the linear continuity, could get rid of the waste of its own tradition and would cease perpetuating the vicious circles which our politicians indulge themselves in. Instead of visiting the technical underground, they quarrel somewhere in the attic, accusing each other of 'smelling' like communists, traitors,

nationalists or irredentists, of local barons or oligarchs without even considering that the stink they we all breathe comes from underneath, from the invisible, unvisitable and uninhabited level where the pots feeding the visible, visitable and inhabited levels (but less and less inhabitable) rumble. So much unfruitful past, so much powerless slag has gathered down there that the Romanian society is disconnected from the power sources necessary for surviving.

Tradition, wrote Hegel, is a golden chain. Throughout the two centuries that marked the turmoil of the Romanian society modernization, some have been enrapt by the gold, ignoring the enchainment or – at best, accepting it unconditionally because it is ‘ours’, while others revolted against the chain, turning their backs on the valuable. To put it simple, the conservators say: ‘It may well be a chain, but is golden’, while the adepts of emancipation say: ‘Golden as it may be, it is still a chain!’ These basic representations have underlain the two fundamental attitudes that collated in the ideological disputes derived, from time to time, from the surge of modernization that has shaken Romanian society in the last two hundred years: from the dispute between the Mitropolitan Grigorie of Valahia and Eufrosin Poteca (1785-1859), where we find a first sample (pre-pasoptist – abbreviation of the year 1848) of modernization, until the protochronism-synchronism dispute in the last decades of the 20-th century (beginning with 1977 when Edgar Papu’s book *Din clasicii nostrii* [From our classics] was published).

I return to the Hegelian metaphor in order to convey the fundamental issue of the yesterday’s and today’s Romanian society: is it worth keeping the ‘chain’ just because it is made of gold? If not, how far should we pierce with the criticism’s knife and which links shall we leave behind so that we remain *ourselves* but, at the same time, fully participate at the *universal civilization*?

In the most trivial reading, the question is rephrased as follows: ‘Is it worth keeping the chain just because it is *ours*, because it belongs to us?’ We rephrase it at such level because at the level of common sense the most wide-spread meaning of the national identity is based on the idea that ‘*Everything that belongs to us is related to the national identity.*’ Therefore, all that belongs to us is sacred, and everything that is sacred is infallible, unassailable and inalienable.

In fact, the thesis *Everything that belongs to us is related to the national identity*’ is the conclusion of a chain of apparently correct, albeit inconsistent $p \rightarrow q$ implications: 1) Everything that belongs to us characterizes us; 2) Everything that characterizes us makes us unique, is related to our particularity; 3) All that makes us unique defines our identity. As you can see, the presence of the universal quantifier in all judgments obliges the one that considers them true to jump at the conclusion that in order to preserve our identity we must not give up anything that belongs to us, that is our legacy. In reality, not everything that belongs to us characterizes us (for instance the structural poverty of the rural life has nothing to do with the ‘national character’). In addition to that, in the identity equation there is no place for all the specific traits, since the subject is not aware of them all (especially in case of large groups as nations).

Out of these false judgments (or unproven as true) o sophism comes to light from the category of two premise and one conclusion syllogisms: 1) Everything that

characterizes us is related to the national identity; 2) X characterizes us; 3) X is related to the national identity. Such reasoning, correct at a first glimpse, may persuade you that “X” shall be conserved, even if it means lack of punctuality, the breach of promises or the irrational exploitation of the woods. The trait in question is neither good nor bad; it must be preserved simply because it simply *belongs to us*. Indeed, a series of documentary evidences show us that “X” belonged to us from Dimitrie Cantemir epoch. In conclusion “This is the way we are!” This is the most repulsive version of conservatism; it cannot be explained by means of common narcissism or egocentrism (in this case, ethnocentrism), but through a large-scale shared sophism. It is a sophism since the major premise “*Everything that characterizes us is related to national identity*” is a false judgment.

This *popular conservatism* is hostile to change in general, to self-change in particular; it is unresponsive to knowledge in general and to self-knowledge in particular. Popular conservatism is fatalist (“It’s not on me to change the world!”) and, at the same time, defeatist (“God forbid a worse thing should happen!”). It reasons with ‘cosmic Christianity’ that Mircea Eliade ascribed to the Romanian people. Therefore, it is outside history, which is why it offers a cross-historical definition to the national identity. In fact, identities, the national one included, – are social constructs and can change from one age to another; moreover, there are historical situations when the change of the national identity is a prerequisite for its survival.

Popular conservatism also reasons with a certain *metaphysics of identity* promoted throughout the years by our intellectual elites, in which identity is perceived as ahistorical, eternal and immutable. A true ‘theology of the national identity’, so dear to the extreme right-wing political forces, grew on this metaphysics¹.

The analysis of the past cannot be limited to the criticism of the immediate part, as we can observe in the most recent studies that deal with the postwar

¹ The theology of national identity is such a powerful dimension of the Romanian mental that even the Romanian communists have been compelled to lean on it when they had to change the legitimating discourse. Acknowledging the failure of the societal project of Marxism, for whose accomplishment it was not prepared, Romanian Communist Party has replaced it with the national project, but a project conceived in terms of the ‘theology of national identity’. Up to a point, things happened exactly like in Moscow, with the only difference that PCUS had replaced the societal project with the imperial one, inspired by the Petru the Great epoch. This functional substitution mechanism made possible in URSS the instauration of a regime that will be known under the name of ‘Stalinism’ and in Romania after 1965 as ‘Ceausism’ – Romanian version of Stalinism. For the Ceausescu’s propaganda apparatus, the communist society itself, designed by the classics as a universal society, had to be adapted to the ‘national specificity’, that is to an eternal and immutable identity. The societal project was replaced with the ideal of modernization, reduced to economic development, understood as state interventionism/dirigisme. The humanist ideal of ‘satisfying material and spiritual needs of the popular masses’ had been replaced by the obsession of nationalization – that is the fight for the concentration of power in the hands of the leading group: ‘For the communist state, human factor were not important, but rather the extension of the state sector in agriculture.’ (Orescu, Șerban, *Ceaușismul. România între anii 1965 și 1989*, București, Editura Albatros 2006, p. 281).

The concern for the ‘national identity’ has functioned for two decades as an alibi for a regime that has failed the societal project and could not admit it. After 1989 political forces used this alibi and pretended to be concerned with safeguarding the national identity in the context of globalization. By virtue of the obvious continuity with Ceausism, these forces have been perceived as being of left-wing but in fact they are of rightwing. In reality, Ceausism hasn’t been a left-wing political regime; is has been a right-wing regime that used as a legitimating discourse a left-wing discourse.

tragedy of the Romanian people as a consequence of the understandings between the winners of the Second World War and as a result of the soviet occupation.

The authors of these studies fail to answer two critical questions;

1) Why is it that the other European countries, victims of the Yalta Treaty, have not reached a cataclysm approaching the proportions of Ceausescu regime?

2) Why is it that in Romania, after the withdrawal of the soviet troops, things have not improved but, to the contrary, went worse?

Explaining everything through the Stalinism brought by the soviet tanks is as if we would tell the following story: The Romanian society, an innocent and virtuous maiden has been sequestered, ravished and impured by Stalinism; the bastard that resulted from this rape has been Ceausism! After 1989, the strategy of the 'scapegoat' functions well, considering that the 'goat' is allogeneous. But this strategy seems to be no only a comfortable simplification from a theoretical point of view, but also a moral infamy: it is a strategy of releasing from responsibility. From a practical-political perspective, it is the loser's strategy, because if we fail to discover the contributions of the Romanian society to the birth of Ceausism, we will go on living 'with the dead in the house', and the fate of the Romanian democracy won't differ from the fate of Romanian socialism: just as we mocked the idea of Socialism, that we grotesquely distorted, we will also mock the idea of democracy, grotesquely distorting it as well.

I don't believe the tragedy Romania experienced – unparalleled in Europe – can be explained only in geopolitical terms, through its postwar fate, as I also can't believe that Ceausism – the most aberrant version of Neo-Stalinism – is explainable only through the production flaws of Stalinism. To the contrary, I truly believe that Ceausism couldn't have been born if Romanian society had not been somehow predisposed, if it hadn't nourished some favorable conditions – and ultimately certain 'pre-existent answers' to foreign challenges.¹

I believe that a profound explication of Ceausism shall rest upon the tracking of those national particularity dimensions that have *pre-pared* the specific answer of the Romanian society to the Stalinism challenge. After all, the historic catastrophe experienced by the Romanian people in the second half of the 20-th

¹ Criticizing the **associationism model** S→R (the stimulus determines the answer of a system according to the relation cause-effect), Jean Piaget supports the idea that the sensitivity of a system to stimulus S means that it is assimilated to a scheme whose manifestation represents the answer. Hence, he concludes with the famous sentence 'The answer came first', which could be translated as follows: even if apparently the answer of a system is caused by the stimulus, in fact a lot of the answer's components *pre-exist* in the system; it is as if the answer is waiting for the stimulus, would haunt it like an opportunity to manifest itself, to become, to update (to cross the threshold between *in potens* and *in actu*). Piaget proves that the associationist scheme according to which the system comes after the answer is an illusion of *post hoc, proter hoc* type. This illusion was to be found not only in the scientific knowledge, but also in the common knowledge: it is common belief that a phenomenon is the effect of another because it comes after it; temporal succession is erroneously perceived as a causal relation.

This is why I believe that analysts that perceive communism just as a *post hoc* answer of Romanian society to the soviet occupation are likely to be overwhelmed by the *post hoc, proter hoc* illusion, and will perceive it just an effect of the foreign occupation. By doing this, they sentence themselves to a long line of superficial understandings of Ceausism as well as to a systematic ignorance as regards Romanian society.

century, especially in the last quarter of the century, has been the upshot of a series of catastrophes that remained unanalyzed and from which no lucid lesson has been learned. Ceausism has been the synthetic and the most monstrous expression of these catastrophes, that our cultural elite has never dealt with analytically in order to extract the necessary conclusions for the change of the current type of civilization. It is, most likely, the sign that the elite of *this* type of civilization is not the bearer of a new civilization. It probably feels that the transformation of Romanian civilization would mean its own downfall. This supposition determines me to suggest to the analysts equally preoccupied by the condemnation of communism and by the future of the country, another direction of analysis that implies an incursion in our remote past. Such an attempt may take place in two concurrent paradigms: *the paradigm of irreconcilable opposition between forms and substance* and the *adaptation paradigm of the forms to the substance*.

1) *The paradigm of irreconcilable opposition between forms and substance*. According to this paradigm, important institutions and ideologies have never really related to our type of civilization and the fundamental contradiction of the modern Romanian society is the opposition between civil society and political society (institutional - state) or, as Mihai Eminescu puts it, the opposition between the 'real country' and the 'legal country'. In this paradigm, communism has been nothing more than a form imposed from the outside, that never stroked roots in the Romanian society and the year 1989 comes to confirm this truth, marking the liberation of the Romanian society from a form alien to its 'nature' and its coming back to its 'true nature' (never defined, but suggested by resorting to the inter-war period myth, a sort of *good old times* from the mythological category of the 'golden age'). In the *irreconcilable opposition paradigm*, the critical analysis of the communist ideology and of the communist institutions in Romania (the totalitarian state and the unique party) is enough for the Romanian society to distance from its past; the enactment of the communist regime as 'illegitimate and criminal' equals to an exorcization and a liberation – at the same time ideological, doctrinarian, psychological and spiritual. In this paradigm, the analysis focuses on the soviet occupation segment – from the Red Army's occupation of Romania (1944) to its withdrawal (1958) as well as on the resistance in the mountains (1946-1958). The privilege of this segment is not stochastic, but closely related to the presuppositions of the paradigm.

2) *The paradigm of mutual adaptation of important forms and of the native substance*. According to this paradigm, the foreign forms, even when violently enforced (including by direct occupation) have adapted to the local substance, while the local substance has adapted to or mimed the adaptation to the alien forms (institutions, doctrines and ideologies). In this paradigm, the radical opposition between the political-institutional system and the civil society is replaced, as an explicative factor, by two processes that in the concurrent paradigm are not visible: social mimetism (of the institutions) and the social accommodation (of the civil society). In the 'mutual adaptation' paradigm, the analysis focuses on the segment after the withdrawal of the soviet troops (1958-1989), that is a period in which the military and administrative occupation had ceased and the functioning of the Romanian institutions was not dictated by soviet advisors. In this paradigm, by far

the most interesting object of study is Ceausism, as an ultimate expression of Romanian communism. It appears as a separate case that is to be approached from another direction than the criticism of the ideologies and analyzed with other theoretical instruments than those used for the study of the communist regimes in other countries – which were similar, but not alike.

2. The ‘real country’ and the ‘legal country’

In the *‘irreconcilable opposition between forms and substance’* paradigm, Neo-Stalinism in its Romanian version has been a political regime in which the political society *interfered from all points of view in the civil society*. We may state that no other political regime has ever gone so far in the annihilation of the civil society as Ceausism did. By its method of organization and functioning, it turned against the alternative political cultures, the civil organization forms, but also against the most intimate fibers of the day to day life, against human existence as such¹.

Someone who does not share this paradigm may address the following question: *‘How is it possible that in the history of a nation such a radical opposition appear (total and exclusive) between the political and civil society?’* In the *‘irreconcilable opposition’* paradigm this may occur in the societies in which, due to a range of historical causes and conditions, either domestic or foreign, the *superstructure prevails*. In other words, in those societies in which the political and administrative institutions, the relations between them and their afferent ideology are brought and enforced *from the outside*.

This is what happened to the Romanian society, from the ‘Fanariot century’ up to this day. Perceiving this particularity of our development, Eminescu suggested as a Romanian pattern of social organization the ‘waiwodes’ age’ (pre-Fanariot age), considering that only such an organization would have ensured an organic development to the Romanian civilization. Let’s overlook the lack of realism of this solution, typically conservative², and keep in mind that

¹ In all other Stalinized countries, beginning with the Soviet Union itself, there has always been a shred of resistance that took shape in the 9th and 10th decade, as we could see in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. As regards the fascists and fascist regimes around and during the Second World War, things were exactly the same (as an instance, the French, Italian Resistance, etc.). There is still a lot of debate about the German resistance against Nazism, but although it could be concluded that it really existed, my statement remain valid: the almost generalized consensus between the Nazi regime and the masses rules out the thesis of a total opposition between public and civil society. In this country, the intimate fiber of human existence was threatened only at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, as a result of the war and the defeat of Germany, and not as a result of an organization and functional principle of the political power.

² When I say ‘typically conservative’ I do not wish to infer that Eminescu would have shared the illusion of the time travel so spread at the level of political psychologies in the conservative groups along the XIX European century. Such insinuations could have been made only by its contemporaries that wanted to portray him as an incurable idealist, if not of crazy, as well as by the proletcultist interpreters of its theoretical work who wanted to depict him as a retrograde, if not a reactionary. But Eminescu must be treated not only as a great poet, but also as a brilliant thinker. In fact, in his theory the ‘voievodal epoch’ functioned as an ‘ideal type’ (Max Weber), just as in Rousseau’s social theory the ‘social contract’ was a mental construction with a strictly methodological role. To say that Eminescu envisioned the return to the epoch of Matei Basarab is as if we would say that Rousseau thought that the governors and the governed have indeed signed a contract some day, at the beginning of history.

Eminescu was not against progress, but against that progress achieved through the institutions, ideologies and social reports that were alien to the 'nature of the Romanian people', to its cultural tradition, to its psychological and spiritual specificity. Just as Maiorescu, he names these important forms 'forms without substance' and accused the 'reds' (the liberals of that epoch) of promoting a development model that eluded the real needs of the people and that sacrificed, first and foremost, the interests of the single 'positive class', that is of the only class truly active, the only one producing social wealth (peasantry): 'We have never been shy and we are not shy even now of declaring, without any faltering, that we support liberal ideas only inasmuch as they do not cause any disturbance to our national development and they do not hustle us to forms of being that are alien to the nature of the Romanian people'¹. The conclusion Eminescu drew was that the hybrid between the civil society (that was Romanian) and the modern superstructure (important) placed Romania in the worst situation ever: it is not barbarian nor civilized, but semi-barbarian, which is worse than barbarianism since – he said – from barbarianism we can evolve towards civilization, but from semi-barbarianism we cannot evolve but towards semi-barbarianism...

Beyond the exaggerations, the language abuses and sometimes the unilateral approaches due to the 'spirit of the age', Eminescu raised a contemporary issue: that of the inadequacy of the institutional superstructure to the civil society – more precisely to a certain type of civil society and a certain development stage thereof. It is the same issue tackled by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea using the metaphor of a monstrous gap between the 'formal de jure state' and the 'real de facto state'.

In less rigorous but more suggestive words, we are dealing with the incongruity between the 'official hour' of Romania and the 'local hour' of the Romanian society, the discovery that the historical time broadcast in Bucharest does not correspond neither to the real status of the economic and social growth nor to the real particularity of the Romanian reality beyond Chitila². For a century and a half, the Bucharest governments have propagated ideologies that implied a desirable but inexistent development state and an imagined,edulcorated, literalized, but inexistent national specificity. This happened before the First World War, between the two world wars, after the Second World War, for the paranoid discourse of the Ceausescu regime to reach the peak of the opposition between the official ideology and the national realities. While the official discourses referred to imaginary 'realities', the civil society has helplessly witnessed, for a century, the occupation of the Capital city by the German troops, the loss of some historical regions, the occupation of the country by the Red Army,

As a matter of fact, one of the most trustworthy interpreters of the Eminescu's journalism puts things straight: 'It is beyond any disproof that M. Eminescu has often eulogized the past but not the past as a whole but the golden ages and its positive significance.' If we sometimes enjoy quoting some of the ancient lords – Eminescu wrote – we do not mean that they time can return (...) – Popescu, Ion Mihail, *Personalități ale culturii românești*, București, Editura Eminescu, 1987, p. 72.

¹ Eminescu, M., *Opere – IV*, București, Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafraș, f.a., p. 211.

² For those who are not familiarized with the topography of the area: Chitila is a suburb of Bucharest but also the first railway station crossed by the trains leaving from the capital city of Romania towards the heart of the county.

the extermination of the cultural modern elite and the peasant aristocracy, the seizure of all instruments of power by a minority.

In societies as those described above a chronic illness is spreading, namely the opposition *between pre-modernity and modernity*. I will further analyze these dimensions that, through their action and interaction, amplify each other under the ‘positive feedback’ pattern discovered by Ilya Prigogin. This mechanism determines the irreducible specificity of these societies, that questions any attempt of assimilating them to the occidental ones or, as defined by Immanuel Wallerstein, the ‘core-states’. In *The Modern World System* (1974), Wallerstein offers the following depiction of the European areas of specialization resulted from the expansion of the world capitalist economy: a) the ‘core’, situated in the North-Western Europe and grouping industrial-urban economies, marked by a powerful urban bourgeoisie; b) ‘semi-periphery’, in the Central Europe, with an economy based on the independence of the land owners, tribute and labor in the tenancy system; c) the ‘periphery’, in the Eastern Europe (as well as in the Latin America) dominated by economies specialized in cornfields and based on labor vassalage¹.

From the angle of the opposition under observation, three types of societies correspond to the three regions: 1) *organic societies*, in which the political society is a ‘natural’ emanation of the civil one, and the modernization has been an ‘organic’ process, deployed from bottom up, as the historical creation of the urban bourgeoisie; b) *semi-organic societies*, in which the political society is neither emanating from nor opposing the civil society, and the modernization has been a cross product of the domestic conditions and of the capitalist system modernization; c) *non-organic societies*, where the political society is invested as a result of the import of ideological and institutional forms, in conflict with the civil society (with the ‘native substance’) and the modernization has been an attempt to enforce the superstructure from top down by a enlightened elite, trusting that the civil society will come to shape itself according to the new ideological and institutional forms (the case of Romanian society and its messianic elites, beginning with the revolutionaries from 1848 or Scoala Ardeleana and ending with the great reformers such as Spiru Haret and Dimitrie Gusti).

Today, the three categories of society evolve on different historical orbits, and the belief that there are only quantitative differences between them that cling to the development stage is a dangerous methodological illusion. This very illusion led to the Romanian ideal to gain ground on the developed countries, materialized in the objective of the Ceausescu regime that “Romania shall be integrated among the medium developed countries and gain on the most developed countries”. It was one of the objectives set out by the *Romanian Communist Party Program of making the multilaterally developed socialist society and leading Romania towards Ceausism*, adopted by the 11-th Congress of the RCP in 1974.

The authors of the *Program*, led by Nicolae Ceausescu, figured that Romania raced on the same track as Great Britain and other similar developed countries

¹ Bădescu, Ilie, *Sincronism european și cultură critică românească*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984, p. 52.

and that the solution for retrieving our losses was to speed up, that is speed up development. Which indeed happened: for the 1975-1979 five year plan, the accumulation rate was of 24% and the five years plan objectives were to be accomplished in four and a half years. It was the 'five years plan of the scientific and technical revolution', followed by the one of the 'new agricultural revolution', by the introduction of the 'new economical-financial mechanism' and in CEPECA managers that were to manage the infrastructure development (of the 'production forces') were trained. All the efforts that up to that point aimed at achieving a 'better and fairer world' have been redirected to the acceleration of the economic growth. In 1989, when the communist regime broke down, from an economic point of view, Romania was at the same distance from the "more developed countries" and in the European economic tops it occupied almost the same places as at the beginning of the '40s¹. Conclusion: the counties grouped in the three categories do not race on the same track, they race in different fields!

Romanian society's way out from the periphery of the modern global system does not imply development but *structural transformation*. He who wants to change the historic fate of Romania shall not speed up, but *transform*. It's about the passage from pre-modernity to modernity.

3. Opposition between pre-modernity and modernity

Modernity represents a type of society that emerged on a certain level of historical progress and in a particular historical space: North-Western Europe. Unfortunately, many believe that 'modern' means 'recent' and when we talk about modernization we talk about motorways and high speed trains – and to roads and sewerage systems in the rural areas; as a rule, people have in mind the critical infrastructure, domain in which our backwardness is most obvious. Modern infrastructure is related to modernity, but it is just one of the consequences of the historical process of modernization. If a society fails to complete this process, it cannot have roads with no holes or sewerage systems in the countryside. This would imply a systematic reasoning, understanding that if the system, as a whole, lacks a quality, the quality in question cannot be found in neither of its component parts. For instance, if Romanian society overrules meritocracy, it stands no change of having motorways resembling those in the Occident. Both meritocracy and motorways are values of the modernity!

Therefore, modernity is a holistic trait that illustrates a type of civilization. Those speaking about modernization in the public space fail to realize that. This is precisely why we do not have a coherent vision regarding Romanian modernization. The lack of systemic reasoning is characteristic both for the 'local barons' who perpetuate a sort of serfage, reproducing feudal-like ways of reasoning and behaving and for the intellectuals that deplore our historical backwardness but who, through their discourses, contribute to its perpetuation. The historical retardation of our intellectual elite is described, in a critical and sometimes self-critical analysis by Teodor Baconsky: 'We haven't yet philosophically and ethically joined up Romania's social, economic and political

¹ Gusti, Dimitrie (coord.), *Enciclopedia României*, vol. III. București, f.e., 1941.

new age. Between the simulated connection to the laic modernity and the fantasmatic refuge in a past that we non-critically idealize, Romanian elites produce lies and then pretend surprised that they has to take the consequences¹.

We, Romanians, live in a disguised feudalism, painted with some stigmas of modernity; we live in a ‘delayed Middle Age’ (recalling us of the title of a piece of the late playwright Romulus Guga). Feudalism is still governing the way we perceive ourselves and we perceive others, the way we live and think, the way we take decisions and the way we act. In addition to that, more often than not we transpose ideologization in the realm of the legendary, of mythology or mysticism. This is what Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, and Horia Sima, and Ceaușescu did. Running away from reality is yet another indicator of the resistance against modernization. This is what almost all our representative intellectuals do: run away from reality, elude facts or over-interpret them. They communicate themselves...In modern countries, intellectuals meditate on the future, offer expertise, look for solutions to current problems society faces.

Unfortunately, analysts of the Romanian contemporary society do not go as far looking for causes. Most of them (there are very few exceptions) explain today’s phenomena through the ‘communist fracture’ – in other words, our historical delay is due only to the four decades of communist regime. To the contrary, from our perspective, Romanian communism has been an expression of our historical retardation –through the way it began, functioned and legitimated itself. The outcome of this process, visible to the naked eye, has been Ceausism (1971-1989) that we consider less a manifestation of communism but rather a manifestation of Romanianness – as type of civilization, as type of culture and as type of identity discourse.

Romanian communism was a peasant communism. And Ceausism was a ‘dictatorship of development’. It has been a failed modernization attempt that degenerated into ‘fascism of helplessness’, as Ingmar Gransted² designated such dictatorships in the middle of the ‘80s. But this attempt failed just because it has been perceived in pre-modern terms. In the terms of a simple society, a peasant society, opaque to the occidental modernity values and with a tacit aversion toward change, communication, rationalization.

In spite of all industrialization and urbanization struggles, Romanian society remained a pre-modern society. According to the modernity criteria, we are at the bottom of all European ranking: the quantity of soap used in a year, the number of students per capita, the railway kilometers per capita, the mortality due to road accidents. When Romania doesn’t come last place, it comes last but one, before Albany and Bulgaria. Exactly like 65 years ago, when the Romanian Encyclopedia was published, edited under the supervision of Dimitrie Gusti.

In a nutshell, Romanian communism has been a pre-modern attempt to modernize the country. Hence, the ensuing deficit of modernity that we inherited after 1989. This idea is not captured by the 880 pages of Tismaneanu report, the authors missing their change of honestly answering the question: ‘Who are we?’ In

¹ Baconsky, Teodor, *Noi și ei*, în *Dilema veche*, Anul VI, nr. 287, 13-19 august 2009, p. 18.

² Gransted, Ingmar, *L’impasse industrielle*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1980.

default of a rational answer to this question, all sorts of intellectual sideslips appear, ranging from the messianic mysticism of a Dan Puric that sees a re-construction of the national identity as ‘a re-falling in love with the Romanian people, as an escape from the hell of oblivion and as a re-embodiment of the people through Christ!’¹, to pious projects as that of Horia-Roman Patapievi, who suggests as an exit from the postmodern nihilism ‘the anchoring to the Spirit of God’s presence’², without advising us on how to put that into practice.

Embracing such approaches we shall only obtain an ideological construction of the national identity. One of the mental habits of the Romanian intellectual is the *ideologization of reality*: minimizing the facts in favor of some ideas, more often than not noble and generous, that dictate the way of reading the facts and then of interpreting them (in fact it is actually an over-interpretation, as the interpretation occurred since the cutting out, classification and setting a hierarchy of facts). Traditionalists shall see a Romanian society, modernists shall see another; autochtonists shall live in a Romania of their own, while the cosmopolites in another – and so on and so forth...This is why we do not have a major plan for Romania.

In our vision, the list of modernity values must comprise: meritocracy versus clientelism; contractualistic morale versus transactional morale; communism versus individualism; respect for norms (including laws) versus voluntarism; orientation towards the future versus legitimating through historical past; interest for the common welfare versus zoological egoism; dialogue versus narcissistic monologue; professionalism v professional imposture; activism versus contemplative idleness; strategic reasoning versus short-term improvisation; pursuing the objectives versus personalization of labor relations; realism versus ideologized and/or moralizing vision; laicization of the state versus state-church complicity; cross-cultural competence versus ethnocentrism; citizenship versus ethnical and/or religious exclusive identity.

The list above includes *meritocracy*. Ceausescu regime has ended leaving behind a swarming of nepotism unrecorded in the communist years. In the ‘50s, the Stalinist criterion of the ‘healthy origin’, an obvious aberration, had cast a chill on the Romanian nepotism. But under Ceausescu, the kindred and neighboring relations, characteristic to the village areas, had its revenge. They prevailed to the detriment of industrial production relationships, the modern professional relationships, of the urban civic ones. After 20 years from the downfall of communism we are as pre-modern as before its installation: fundamental state institutions, almost all public institutions are chocked by interests groups based on the blood and neighboring links.

It became famous the case of the Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture, inspected in 2007 by a recently appointed minister of Agriculture who came out and, perplexed, said: ‘In APIA all employees are relatives!’ The result: an year after its joining the European Union, Romania was the single EU member state that did not access not even an euro from the European Union funds for agricultural grants,

¹ Puric, Dan, *Cine suntem*, București, Platytera, 2008, p. 165.

² Patapievi, Horia-Roman, *Omul recent*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2001.

In two years' time, another recently appointed minister discovers the same situation within the Ministry of Administration and Interior: 'sources from the Ministry of Interior suggest the idea that Dan Nica intends to dissolve DGIPI and to organize all over again DGA, decision deriving from the 'godfatherships' and kindred relations within the ministry'¹.

In February 2009, the Permanent Bureau of the Social-Democratic Party suspended from office the president of PSD Botosani branch, Constantin Conțac, following the signals received from members of the county organization regarding the nominations list for the positions of managers in the deconcentrated institutions. Constantin Conțac, at the same time vice-president of Botosani County Counsel has appointed only his relatives and close friends, among whom the sister of Botosani PSD president, nominated for the management of the Direction for Agriculture and Rural Development. On 4th of April, Constantin Conțac, has been excluded from the Social-Democratic Party².

Romanians promote each other for the sake of resources, namely the public income: sons and brothers, cousins and godfathers, godmothers and mistresses, men living in the same village or city (and in the worst scenario, in the same county). In this line, it is worth reading the volume of studies coordinated by Professor Adrian-Paul Iliescu, *Mentalități și instituții [Mentalities and Institutions]*³. In this respect, we are right in the middle of the feudal age, a type of civilization in which the main social relationships are those based on relatives and neighbors. Francis Fukuyama uses, in the depiction of traditional pre-modern societies, the term 'a ray of faith': the relatives and the neighbors are the only figures that matter as trust and moral obligations sources⁴. When the ray of faith is so dim, the state representing a trust and obligation source is entirely out of the question; it is a too farther and too abstract entity. The state serves only for extortion.

Among the above-mentioned values of modernity we find *citizenship*, as a modern form of identity. It has been said more than once that the ethnical and/or religious identity saved Romanian people from extinction, that had they not had 'people conscience' Romanians would have been assimilated to the peoples that passed by and settled in this territory. Until it is proven otherwise, we can accept that this is what happened, but this happened before the modern epoch, when life was framed by the local community, the social organization principle was tradition and the community cohesion was ensured by the compliance with that tradition. We are dealing with a 'closed society', as described by Karl Popper in *Open Society and Its Enemies*⁵.

But modern society is an open society in which tradition is replaced by theories of truth, compliance with the tradition is replaced by argumentations and

¹ *Jurnalul Național*, 26th of March 2009, p. 4.

² According to Mediafax, 5th of April, 3.56 p.m.

³ Iliescu, Adrian-Paul (coord.), *Mentalități și instituții*, București, Editura Ars Docendi, 2002.

⁴ Borțun, Dumitru, *Globalizare și capital social*, în *Agora social-democrată*, București, nr. 2 (3), iunie, 2000.

⁵ Popper, Karl, *Societatea deschisă și dușmanii ei*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1993, vol. I, pp. 195-227.

the links between people (relatives or neighbors) are replaced by abstract links (state-citizen, governed – governor, producer-consumer, etc.).

At national scale, the conscience of ethnic unity cannot underlie a real solidarity. The traditional community, based on ‘national conscience’ (Henri Stahl) did not exclude in any way individualism. The frequently invoked peasant collectivity, often brought up in order to celebrate the historical roots of ‘Romanian communitarianism, of ‘Romanian solidarity’ has been but an administrative organization form, whose main function was economic: the succession of fortune and the distribution of the land parcels among the family groups – the so called ‘groves’ and then ‘troops’¹. But, as I will show henceforth, the peasant individualism has nothing to do with the modern individualism described by Karl Popper in *The Open Society* as a product of ‘individuity’ or of ‘individualization’, but instead it is a psychological and moral individualism, functioning in a social background in which ‘we’ means rather ‘we-as-number (*le-moi-numero*), a connection in which the person manifests itself in a superficial manner.

In closed societies, of rural type, sociability and interaction are based especially on the similitude of certain external situations or events, not on common values. At a cognitive level, the individual remains egocentric, and at the level of the behavior, he remains egoist. The moral consequences are the fear towards difference and intolerance towards otherness, while the ideological consequences are xenophobia and nationalism.

The current problem of Romania is not so much the existence of the peasant individualism, as peasants indeed have a peasant individualism, but the fact the almost half of its population is made up of peasants. In addition to that, the urban population is made up of a great number of urbanized people at the first or second generation. During the 40 years of communism eight million people migrated to the cities (an annual average of 200.000). At this pace, urban enculturation failed. An overwhelming majority brought along pre-modern cultural patterns. They form the critical mass of today’s urban population. How many of them can have a civil culture and a responsible behavior put in service of the common welfare?

From a speculative perspective, taken out of its real context, we could say ‘This is our way of being, what is the problem with that?’ The problem is that in the current historical phase, our objectives are modern, not pre-modern. Therefore, there is a huge gap between the objectives and the means to reach them. ‘Gap’ is a ‘historicist’ concept. From a logical point of view, we no longer speak of a gap, but of a contradiction! The fundamental contradiction of the contemporary Romanian society is the *contradiction between goals and means*. In fact, it is the contemporary form of the contradiction between ‘modern forms and local substance’, signaled by Titu Maiorescu 150 years ago. I have already shown² why the modernization of the Romanian society, process that began in the middle of the 19-th century, has not yet ended. Among the values of modernity as type of civilization we encounter *citizenship* – but not as a political status, but as

¹ Stahl, H., *Istoria socială a satului românesc*, Editura Paideia, 2002, pp. 113-136.

² Borțun, Dumitru, *Relațiile Publice și noua societate*, București, Editura Tritonic, 2005, pp. 46-54.

an identity form that exceeds the ethnical and/or religious identity. Modern citizenship has nothing to do with the kindred or neighborhood relationships or with the religious confession, it has to do with common values (*res publica*), with a shared political ideal, so with a *political community*. But, in the Romanian society, such a community never existed. Historian Daniel Barbu considers that until the communist regime there had not even existed a public domain per se; he even claims that the failure of communism in Romania was due to the lack of the population's inappetence for involvement in public affairs; it '...seemed decided to refuse the obligation to share any kind of responsibility for the fulfillment of a social project. Romanians have abandoned communism not only because it was a global project erroneously formulated and applied, but because they were not willing, for that matter, to participate to any kind of social project'¹.

Therefore, the national identity of the Romanians, representing 89.5% of the total population, is an *ethnical* one. This statement refers not only to the Romanian ethnics; it applies for the Hungarians and gypsies as well. This social-cultural landscape is drawn, with the scalpel of a lucid and honest analysis, by the same European intellectual, Teodor Baconsky: 'We have left yet another unfinished site: that of post-nationalism. The house of the nation should now be built with the bond of democratic contractualism and of constitutional patriotism, but we continue to perceive it as a mythical construction, sacred legacy and immutable values treasury, etc. Epistemic gaps, perfectly imputable to those who should have symbolically determined their reduction'².

Therefore, *the fundamental problem of Romanian society is modernization*. This explains why any study, political program or societal project that do not stem from the concept of modernization is a futile undertaking. On a short-time basis, it could be useful only to those interested in slowing down the country's modernization, but in the end we will all lose.

The failure of the communist regime in Romania was the failure of Romania's modernization. Today, the failure of Romania's modernization may lead to the failure of the democratic regime in Romania. It would be a real catastrophe with long-term consequences, difficult to anticipate. The possibility of such catastrophe cannot be easily accepted. But the first signs began to rush...

REFERENCES

1. Bădescu, Ilie, (1984), *Sincronism european și cultură critică românească*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.
2. Barbu, Daniel, (1999), *Republica absentă*, București, Ed. Nemira.
3. Borțun, Dumitru, (2005), *Relațiile Publice și noua societate*, București, Ed. Tritonic.
4. Eminescu, M., *Opere – IV*, (f.a.), București, Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafras.
5. Gransted, Ingmar, (1980), *L'impasse industrielle*, Paris, Le Seuil.

¹ Barbu, Daniel, *Republica absentă*, București, Editura Nemira, 1999, p. 16.

² Baconsky, Teodor, *Noi și ei*, în *Dilema veche*, Anul VI, nr. 287, 13-19 august, 2009, p. 18.

6. Gusti, Dimitrie, (coord.), (1941), *Enciclopedia României*, vol. III. București, f.e.
7. Iliescu, Adrian-Paul (coord.), (2002), *Mentalități și instituții*, București, Ed. Ars Docendi.
8. Orescu, Șerban, (2006), *Ceaușismul. România între anii 1965 și 1989*, București, Ed. Albatros.
9. Patapievici, Horia-Roman, (2001), *Omul recent*, București, Ed. Humanitas.
10. Popescu, Ion Mihail, (1987), *Personalități ale culturii românești*, București, Ed. Eminescu.
11. Popper, Karl, (1993), *Societatea deschisă și dușmanii ei*, București, Ed. Humanitas.
12. Puric, Dan, (2008), *Cine suntem*, București, Platytera.
13. Stahl, H., (2002), *Istoria socială a satului românesc*, Ed. Paideia.
- ***, (2007), *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport final*, București, Ed. Humanitas.