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IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY

Three Essays on Eastern Europe and
Contemporary Western Narratives

E-I-K O N

București, 2022

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A Non-Ideological, Historical and Cultural View on the Past and the Present of a Closed, yet Open Society

MOTTO:

"The progress of a society results from superior education and freedom, not from ideological ukases and the thought police. 'Professional' progressists block any kind of evolution by illustrating moral rules that are 'brought' from the future and by practicing totalitarian intransigence on a daily basis (he who is not with us is against us); yet, in their normative fanaticism, they emerge on the surface and profit by creating social fault lines and deepening such crevasses.

An 'illuminated' and radical minority was responsible for the Bolshevik revolution. Another minority, made up of individuals who do not admit any working hypotheses 'committed' the national-socialist revolution. It is tiring to notice the lack of historical imagination of the devil. . . ."

Teodor Baconschi, Romanian writer, former Ambassador and former Foreign Minister of Romania

Introduction:

Romania Yesterday and Today

This study is dedicated to a very small area in Europe – the Maramureş County in the north of Transylvania, a historical province of Romania, which

is used metonymically to represent Transylvania, Romania, Eastern Europe and what it has meant for people around here to be born in this county, live here for millennia, and what it means for them to live here today. My argumentation is based on a re-interpretation of some of Karl Popper's ideas and reasoning put forth seventy years ago; I had in mind the context of an East European country which has known and been through very many historical dire straits and has had the experience of being forced into a definition of a *closed* society, which I do not consider to be entirely accurate. To demonstrate that Karl Popper's definitions of an open and closed society have a superficial and somewhat abusive interpretation today, the best method is to focus on such historical events as the ones that characterize today's Romania in general, and our Maramureş County, in particular.

Part of this study is rather testimonial, in the sense that I illustrate some of my arguments with my own experience as member of a historical family in my county, a professor, and a person who lived the most tragic moments of our past 50 years. Consequently, the language and style of such testimonial might be rather informal and oral, but I really think that it is important for the democratic countries in the West of Europe to stop and meditate on the experience of countries in the East, and that it is us, eastern academics who need to be more vocal, more eloquent, and more convincing.

Romania today is a state that seems to make very little sense, both for people living there, and for those visiting it. With so many people working abroad, with so much corruption everybody has heard of, with many years of a crypto-communist regime after the anti-communist Revolution, and with so many signals that human rights are not observed, Romania is still recovering from the dark decades of the socialist/communist totalitarian regime. One of the major tasks of the Marxists was the creation of the 'new man', who would be the perfect embodiment of socialist equality and equity, and who will work for the good of all people, expecting to get only what he needs and rejecting any kind of fantasies, magic or surreal experiences, religion of any kind, in his permanent endeavor to bring the 'capitalist hydra' to an end. Scared by the Russian tanks in 1946, when the socialist party fraudulently won elections in a horrible manner, with a newly declared republic, which seemed so unnatural for a country that had only been a monarchy for millennia, with all values upside down (the plumber of the university became the rector overnight, even if he had obtained no degree), and with most of its elites in prison or working camps, Romanians had to find new ways to survive. (Elites does not mean supremacists, or patriarchs, but people – men, women, and the young people – **who were** best in their trades, professors, politicians, **military,**

clerics, peasants, religious groups, Gypsy, artists.... people who just opposed the new regime, and who were not afraid to express their opposition). The new regime took people's houses, families were moved in the basements of their own houses to make room for the proletarians – even widows and orphans were just left with no home or income at all. Children in school started being indoctrinated, they were pioneers, and learned the biographies of the new leaders, who became their gods overnight, so many parents had to explain that there was one thing that was said in school, and another at home, and that the children needed to just not speak their minds. Ever. Then, the political police – the Securitate – was a silent, but very effective, army, which arrested people at night and took them to places they never came back from. After a while, they just corrupted people to enlist in a long series of informants for just some money, or some food, or another type of privilege, or just to escape from a political investigation.

Such times were bound to take a toll on people, and after '89 the 'new man' started to be more present than ever. Romania almost drowned in corruption, governments were very ineffective, they sold the industrial park for nothing, sold our forests, forced our intelligence to go abroad, as well as the best workers, while they got richer and richer on a recipe learned from the communist regime – most of

the 'new' democrats, were, in fact, old totalitarians (or their children). People learned their lesson very quickly, and started to use and abuse the corrupt state, even kept Romania in a state of corruption by voting for the same party many times, because they saw the ways in which they could trick justice and do onerous business.

Obviously, not everybody did the same, and after a while, especially older people who had lived before communism, and young people who were born in freedom started expressing their wish to change the face of the country, in such a way as to put it on the list of democratic countries, where the law is observed, and where politicians understand that the days of theft are over. The past few years had millions of people on the streets, whose only interest was to get their country back.

It is very difficult to rebuild a normal state, since many people who were born and raised in the darkest times of the totalitarian regime are afraid of freedom, afraid of competition, and afraid of foreigners. The only 'sane' manner would be to go back to the 'survival kit' Romanians used in the past very many times, when their country was oppressed, under attack from all sides, and when they had to preserve their culture, their identity, and their soul. Maramureş is representative for how people can survive in such harsh historical times.

The European 'Guilt' and an East-European Non-Ideological Response

To address the afore mentioned metonymical interpretation, the first step would be to state the belief of the author in what she calls 'non-ideology', or 'non-ideological', because it is today's ideology that comes very much against a deeper and a more stirring deciphering of how illustrative the case of such a small part of Europe can be, and how it can bring clarity and sincerity to the process of (re-)defining Europe. Today's ideology of political correctness – the rhetoric of the 'progressive' parties and politicians, as well as of a group of thinkers, professors, artists, etc. largely based on a Marxist, postmodern and postcolonial critique – will 'blame' the Judeo-Christian, white, privileged, colonist, crusading, supremacist, racist and anti-feminist Europe for all evils in the world. By doing so, they are also trying to not only expose the 'evils' of such a historical and cultural background, but also deny all the values and principles Europe was built on. The message of East European countries is much different; most of these countries continue to believe in those values, and maintain that Europe should just evolve to a better understanding of humanism and the role of more open-minded philosophies and

doctrines, but they should do so according to and based on those values that founded this civilization in the first place – and from here there are the much blamed and shamed voices of representatives in Hungary, Poland, or the Czech Republic, who are considered to be retrograde, right-wing, patriarchal, etc.

Well, not *all Europeans were privileged, colonists, crusaders, or invaders*. To define Europe as a homogeneous mass made up of peoples who have all been through the same experiences is not only counter-productive, but wrong and false (And this is just to discuss ‘peoples’, because if we think in terms of ‘people’, and how many actual people had anything to say about such ‘endeavors’ of their times, things get really complicated). This is one aspect that scares East Europeans, because they understand the value of history in a very different manner, they are less inclined to toy with the thought of history as just another story, or with other social and historical categories as just ‘constructed’ realities. Let us take the case of Romania, which is made up of three historical provinces: Moldova, Transylvania and Țara Românească/Walachia – which largely correspond to the area to the east of the Romanian Carpathians, the intra-Carpathian area, and the south of the Carpathians, to the Danube. Romanians are descendant from the

ancient Dacians – Thracians who lived around the Carpathians – and the Romans, who conquered and colonized Dacia in the first hundred years of the first millennium, AD. The language of the people is Romanian, that is, a Romance language – from the same family of languages as Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, etc. – and the main religion is Greek Orthodox. Although the country seems to be rather homogeneous from an ethnic and religious point of view, there are many places around the country where people live in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith environment, and they have lived so historically. These three Provinces got united in history several times, but the last union was in 1918, a hundred years ago, when the last Romanian province, Transylvania, escaped from the abusive power of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and reunited with the other two provinces, which had become Romania in the meantime. The scope of this paper is to shed light upon a specific aspect related to a definition of open/closed society, but to end this introductory part, it is important to mention that in our history Romanians never went to colonize other people, never fought a war to conquer other territories; they have just tried to defend what was theirs from immemorial times. They did not go on crusades – only when they were under attack from the Ottoman Empire, which was the main invader

for more than 400 years – and they paid their share of sacrifices and deaths on the altar of their faith. Even one of the Wallachian kings, Constantin Brancoveanu, when taken to Istanbul to renounce at his faith, he had to lose not only his life, but be witness at how his four sons were killed one by one in front of him, just to force him to give up his Christian faith and become Muslim. They did not give up their faith. Today, we just accuse Christians of all atrocities, but for these Millennials who seem to know everything, a glimpse in such real histories might be illuminating. Tartars and Turks led wars of invasion and colonization for a very long time, in the name of their faith, and in total disrespect and contempt for the Europeans who were trying to save Europe from their invasion: for a long time, Romania was on the front line on the eastern border of Europe, trying to stop such invasions.

Our church did not burn women at the stake, nor did they encourage marriages for under-aged girls. Our priests are married men, so there are very few stories of abuse and other such ideologically manipulated facts that might fuel a disregard for the Romanian Church. Romanians in Transylvania were ethnics of these territories, and they were conquered by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, denied any civil rights, denied the right to build houses made of brick and stone, denied the right to live in towns

and cities. Their names were transcribed with a Hungarian spelling, so that the census might number them as Hungarians. Then, our provinces had to live for a very long time with the danger in the East – the big Russian neighbor that has been our enemy forever – our Voivodes and Kings preferred to pay taxes to the Ottomans, instead of getting to any understanding with the Russians. And they knew why.... Nevertheless, after WWII, we were ‘given’ in the bulk of countries to the Soviet Empire, which meant that for almost fifty years we had to endure a totalitarian regime. That regime was imposed by the Soviet tanks, by intimidation, by arresting and killing tens of thousands of people, by turning values upside-down. The regime killed not only politicians, or military, but also professors, and peasants, and priests, and young people, women, everybody who tried to oppose the ‘socialist ideals’. People in the West have coquetted with socialism and Marxism, and some ‘believers’ argued that we liked the regime that was enforced on us if there was an apparently small opposition to it. Unfortunately, these last developments in the West – with the anti-European propaganda – prevent our countries from getting our history out properly, as the Jews have. Somehow, our misfortunes, our tragedies, the millions of victims in the Soviet and Communist Gulag cannot be brought into discussion; not if so many flirt with