

EUROPEAN ROMANIA TRIP IN THE 17 YEARS OF INTEGRATION

Cristian POPA*
Veronica MIHALACHE**

ABSTRACT: *This paper highlights a synthetic balance of the 17 years of European Romania, a period in which, we believe, Romania has learned to be one of the most active promoters of the continuation and deepening of the integration process in the great European family. From this perspective, we aim to highlight brief empirical observations on some of the most relevant dimensions (political, economic, social and security) that define this integration process. At the same time, the reference year marks a temporal “boundary” that, on the one hand, delimits pre- and post-pandemic Europe and, on the other hand, makes it a witness to a military conflict that is unacceptable and incomprehensible in this century. There are two new challenges that “test” the capacity for adaptation and European decision-making, but, above all, unity on the future of the community. We appreciate that the “Much more together” scenario - promoted by Jean Claude Juncker, in 2017, shows us that the commitments to the established political, economic, military and security priorities can only be achieved through complementarity and further deepening the accession process. So, we need a more united, stronger and more cooperative community, especially in the current context of insecurity on its eastern border.*

KEYWORDS: *European Union, European integration, political dimension, economic dimension, social dimension, security dimension.*

JEL Code: K00

DOI: 10.62838/cjjc-2024-0027

The European Union illustrates the most successful political project in history, in which Romania has undergone the largest process of political reform, mobilizing and transforming all the levels underlying the institutional and legal structure of the state. His actions and projects have become increasingly ambitious, with the main aim of deepening the integration of the state in the European community.

* Associate professor Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, ROMANIA.

** Associate professor University of Bucharest, ROMANIA.

We mark 17 years since Romania joined the European Union¹, a period in which, we believe, it has learned to be one of the most active promoters of continuing and deepening the integration process in the big European family. From this perspective, we aim to highlight brief empirical observations on some of the most relevant dimensions (political, economic, social and security) that define this integration process. At the same time, the reference year marks a „temporal landmark” which, on the one hand, delimits Europe before and after the pandemic and, on the other hand, it witnesses an unacceptable and incomprehensible military conflict in this century. There are two new challenges that „test” the ability to adapt and make decisions at the European level, but especially the unity on the future of the community. However, it does not fall within our sphere of interest.

1. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

Beyond the aspect of defining structural identity, as a single entity that shares the characteristics of confederal and federal systems, the European Union offers a political model based on prosperity and stability, within which special importance is given to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thus, the European society model sets out four fundamental freedoms for its citizens, namely the free movement of persons, capital of goods and services.

Ever since joining the European Union, Romanians have best understood the essence of the „stone of EU” citizenship, that is, the freedom of movement and residence in the EU, and, proof of this is the constantly progressive phenomenon of social mobility generated by millions of fellow countrymen. Like other citizens of post-communist states, now members of the EU, Romanians emigrated to the most powerful European economies for understandable reasons.

If they understood that in the new „motherlands” they will be guaranteed the acquisition of a better social status, then Romania must also understand the urgency of improving the political and socio-economic system, in accordance with the absolutely natural expectations of its own citizens, in this case the priority being political and socio-economic stability.

Also, the free movement of goods, services and capital involves the organization of policies, own legislation and an institutional framework to ensure their observance, context in which Romania has the obligation to follow, consistently, the related legislative and institutional harmonization process.

In other news, Romania has „passed the exam” at all easy – of the rotating presidency at the European Council, recording some progress in key areas (energy and environment, digital single market, digital single market, border security or economic and monetary union), but also some dissatisfaction has been expressed by some European leaders regarding the *„level of political ambition and various contradictory actions of the Romanian Government”*².

¹ Popa, Cristian, *Justiția Europeană. Dimensiuni, repere, perspective*, Editura Concordia, Arad, 2007, p. 156-159.

² Bilanțul Președinției României la Consiliul UE, în plenul Parlamentului European, [Online] la <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20190711IPR56826/> bilanțul-presedintiei-romaniei-la-consiliul-ue-in-plenul-parlamentului-european, accessed 10.09.2024.

Romania has left behind the negative perception towards the accession process itself, to which was added the rhetoric related to the cession of sovereignty, and it was convinced of the benefits of political autonomy and the benefits of European solidarity. But the organization is constantly evolving, and an ever-expanding and diverse union is expected to involve many opposing state actors in conflicts of interest, or marked by an obsession with sovereignty.

In the current context generated by the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, we believe that initiating the process through which Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia will be able to become, in the future, members of the Community bloc will exclude the expression of national „sensitivities”, the imperative being to meet the legitimate expectations of the candidate countries, without undermining the operational efficiency of the common institutions.

2. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

The phenomenon of globalization, which involves, among other things, the global integration of states, financial markets and free market technology³, it is considered „the most complex form of internationalization of economic activity”⁴. In this way, economic agents actively take part in the fight for competitiveness in the global market.

Economic integration of states by adapting policies and institutional constructions has become a historical necessity. Within the economic theory of international relations is detached the theory of economic integration, being very important for the policy and economy of states aiming to increase competitiveness at global and regional level by joining economic communities such as the EU.⁵

The phenomenon of European economic integration aims at „increase of productivity in the context of inter-conditions determined by elements such as: division of sectoral and local labor, at national, regional or global level or mobility of factors of production, and a goods and services”⁶. Integration therefore becomes a continuous process, a way of achieving the objectives and not an end.

Romania's accession to the European Union is undoubtedly an important moment in the economic development of the state. Immediately after the accession year, Romania benefited from billions of euros of structural and cohesion funds, respectively non-reimbursable, intended infrastructure modernization and the adoption of measures to increase living standards. Therefore, it is extremely important for Romania to increase their absorption capacity, especially in the current context, marked by economic, military, or sanitary crises, whose effects are hard to predict.

Although joining the euro area could bring several undeniable benefits to the economy, Romania is still waiting to join it, after meeting the convergence criteria with the community member states. The targets set by government and NBR officials for the adoption of the euro have repeatedly proved unrealistic, although opinions on the subject

³ Popa, Cristian, *Considerații privind strategia realizării pieței unice interne a UE*, Universitatea Națională de Apărare “Carol I”, Centrul de Studii Strategice de Apărare și Securitate, Sesiunea de Comunicări Științifice “Dinamica mediului de securitate european”, București, 2007.

⁴ Dent, Christopher M., *The European Economy, The Global Context*, Routledge, 1997, p. 1.

⁵ Luțaș, Mihaela, *Integrarea economică europeană*, Editura Economică, București, 1999, p. 40.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 41.

are divided. The process is complex, but Romania must make progress in implementing the related budgetary and structural reforms.

It is relevant to add the position of the European Union as a global economic power, a strong position, acting together as a single voice on the world stage, but containing at the same time, inside it 28 (27, after Brexit) separate trade strategies that have managed to adapt to the community. The dynamics and mobility with which the economy operates globally makes the EU an important player on the international scene, which every day, exports products worth hundreds of millions of euros and imports hundreds of millions more.

The increasingly interdependent economic environment proves the need for full European integration and adaptation of Romania, due to the benefits it brings. The accession to the EU represented a real progress from an economic, social and political point of view, which brought Romania closer to those of a strong European economy.

3. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PROSPECTS OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

As regards the social dimension of the EU, one of the most important aspects is identity. This is the basis of the state structure, because it refers to the elements that define society.

The formation of European identity does not require the replacement of national identities and does not require a substitution for them. These two dimensions coexist and are due to the existence of the distinct characteristics that the two meet. The European construction has formed its own cultural identity, which leaves its mark on the member nation states. Thus, the EU has its own symbols, myths and events that belong to the past and which are part of its history.

For the post-communist states, and for Romania as well, the relationship between identity and integration has generated strong tensions, theoretical disputes, or ideological conflicts. We appreciate that the reconstruction of the identity of these states left behind „crisis of identities and the imperative of integration”, overcoming the identity conflict that risks endangering both economic and moral reform in these countries, as they pursued integration into modern European structures.

In other news, human capital is one of Europe's strengths, the improvement of which must be seen as a long-term investment, not an expense. The convergence we have spoken about in the previous lines must be seen as a common goal and a leitmotif of the Economic and Monetary Union. European citizens should no longer associate it with lower living standards and lower incomes, specially since many of these phenomena are largely determined by the decisions of the member states. An example of this would be the necessary budgetary reinforcements by increasing taxes for employees or failing to develop citizens' skills to face the increasingly competitive economy.

The EU must embrace a logic of upward convergence and incorporate the social component at the heart of its objectives and plans. And in this context, we believe, Romania must avoid failure to adopt a social policy that, through inadequate protection systems and measures, could expose citizens to the risk of poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECURITY AND DEFENSE DIMENSION IN THE EU ARCHITECTURE

The construction of the EU did not have as main objective the consolidation of a security organization in the traditional sense. Its external activity reflected rather a dominant emphasis on integration, context in which it played a strategic role by establishing a new system of relations between European states that represented the so-called „security through existence”. External security issues were included for the first time in the process of European integration by the Treaty, signed in Maastricht (1992), in the Treaty, where the second pillar of the EU consists of a common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Currently, the CFSP, implicitly the CSDP, has obtained a legitimate status.

The security dimension of the EU was created in an age of depolarization of power and threats that are increasingly varied and difficult to predict at both state level, but also global.⁷ The field of defense and security no longer depends exclusively on activities involving the use of military means and ceases to identify with the defense of a well-defined territory.

In addition to regional conflicts, transnational threats with a major impact on states are to be considered, so the status and power of international actors is no longer quantified by their military force, because it is no longer the only pillar of stability. In addition, the scope given to the segment of common foreign policy, security and defense is naturally part of the process of deepening European integration and involves, continuation of the transfer of the sovereign attributes of the member states to the EU.

It is more than obvious that the European Union has continued the process of Community enlargement, even at geopolitical and geo-economic risk. On the one hand, we can talk about a qualitative transformation of the Union, as, on the other hand, we can imagine unpredictable developments, which would jeopardize this process which is particularly favorable to any country of the European continent. Even in this context, Romania's contribution is more than salutary.

Moreover, it is necessary to note the transition from taking an operational role in the field of crisis management, by conducting numerous military and civilian missions executed or in progress in the Western Balkans, Caucasus, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, defining a particularly ambitious action plan for the joint effort to strengthen European security and defense policy by 2030, called The Strategic Compass⁸ (March, 21, 2022), with the aim of making the Union a stronger security provider and more capable of responding to potential military aggression, including, but above all, protecting its citizens, values and interests.

Distinctly, Romania has a special interest in actively strengthening stability and security in the Extended Black Sea Region and promoting the values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The role of Romania will be increasingly important in the region, given the recent negative evolutions from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of

⁷ Onișor, Constantin, Mihalache, Veronica, *Introducere în problematica securității*, Editura ANIMV, București, 2011, p. 53-66

⁸ O busolă strategică pentru consolidarea securității și apărării UE în următorul deceniu, [Online] la <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>, accessed la 14.09.2024.

view, but without excluding the regional cooperation dimension, practiced particularly during this period.

5. IN CONCLUSION...

We considered a brief analysis on the main aspects of the evolution of European Romania, in a community that illustrates the most successful political project in history. Considering the practical and theoretical elements that contributed to the process of accession and evolution of the Romanian state within the organization, we can say that this historical stage represented for Romania the largest process of political reform. It mobilized and transformed all the levels underlying the institutional and legal structure of the state.

We can say that the EU is the most successful experiment in the field of international cooperation, but also a daunting analytical challenge. Events, such as the economic and refugee crisis, the intensification of the terrorist threat or the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, it shows that there is a need for a continuous adaptation and enhancement of the capacities to anticipate response and decision responses regarding the future of the community.

Starting from the speech of Jean Claude Juncker⁹ on the five evolutive scenarios of the community, we appreciate that it would be beneficial to intensify cooperation and solidarity within the European community, especially in the current context of insecurity on its eastern border. „Much more together” shows us that commitments to established political, economic, military and security priorities can only be achieved through complementarity and by deepening the accession process. So, we need a more united, stronger and more cooperative community.

REFERENCES

- Dent, Christopher M., *The European Economy, The Global Context*, Routledge, 1997, p. 1.
- Luțaș, Mihaela, *Integrarea economică europeană*, Editura Economică, București, 1999, p. 40.
- Møler, Bjørn, *The EU as a Security Actor, “Security by Being” and “Security by Doing”*, în DIIS Report, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2005.
- Popa, Cristian, *Justiția europeană. Dimensiuni, repere, perspective*, Editura Concordia, Arad, 2007, p. 156-159.
- Popa, Cristian, *Considerații privind strategia realizării pieței unice interne a UE*, Universitatea Națională de Apărare “Carol I”, Centrul de Studii Strategice de Apărare și Securitate, Sesiunea de Comunicări Științifice “Dinamica mediului de securitate european”, București, 2007.
- Rădulescu, Mugurel, *Europa în mișcare*, Editura Tritonic, București, 2005, p. 137.

⁹ Viitorul UE: Deputații discută cele cinci scenarii prezentate de Jean-Claude Juncker, [Online] la <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20170228IPR64287/viitorul-ue-deputatii-discuta-cele-cinci-scenarii-prezentate-de-j-c-juncker>, accessed 14.09.2024.

- Onișor, Constantin, Mihalache, Veronica, *Introducere în problematica securității*, Editura ANIMV, București, 2011.
- Fișe descriptive despre Uniunea Europeană, Parlamentul European, [Online] la <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/147/libera-circulatie-a-persoanelor>, accessed 10.09.2024.
- Bilanțul Președinției României la Consiliul UE, în plenul Parlamentului European, [Online] la <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20190711IPR56826/bilantul-presedintiei-romaniei-la-consiliul-ue-in-plenul-parlamentului-european>, accessed 10.09.2024.
- O busolă strategică pentru consolidarea securității și apărării UE în următorul deceniu, [Online] la <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>, accessed 14.09.2024.
- Viitorul UE: Deputații discută cele cinci scenarii prezentate de Jean-Claude Juncker, [Online] la <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20170228IPR64287/viitorul-ue-deputatii-discuta-cele-cinci-scenarii-prezentate-de-j-c-juncker>, accessed 14.09.2024.

