

Politics of Reverence: Romania in relation to the Russian Federation

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Abstract. The present paper dares, within an interdisciplinary research attempt, to highlight the recent issues of Romanian-Russian bilateral rapports, focusing primarily on the eventful interlude of the relationships between Romania and the Russian Federation, specific to the 2000-2004 period, qualified as emblematic in the official speech, due to the forecast attempts to reset the rapports between Romania and the Russian Federation. In the first section of this paper, appealing to diachronic usage, we aim to reveal the main referential moments, characteristic to the immediate history of the Romanian-Russian rapports, paying an increased attention to the 2000-2004 episode, relevant through the process registered in the bilateral dimension, due to a relatively propitious frame, predisposed towards an incipient recovery and normalization of the rapports. Unfortunately, not even this short referential interlude, deserving as it may be in some respects, could not minimize the ballast of a bilateral convulsed past, marked by trauma, and causing a precipitated delay of the main actions with constructive and pragmatic potential, in plain process of development. In the second part of the paper, we try to identify the main elements that determine a rather dissonant and discontinuous register of the Romanian-Russian rapports, specific to the present era, highlighting, at the end of the paper, possible solutions to unblock the entire bilateral process. Synthetically, the desideratum of the paper has in view a thorough radiography of the manner in which the Romanian-Russian relationship has been re-conceptualized and remodeled in its immediate horizon, aiming to reveal the subtleness of a complex and fascinating bilateral condominium, in which the aspirations and initiatives of the protagonists are presently still radically opposed.

Keywords: bilateral rapport, politics of reverence, self-perception, the process of forgiving

1. Introduction

To register in an academic and scientific circle the problematics of Romania's relations with the Russian Federation, while focusing segmentally on their recent trajectory, implies an analytical approach that is both difficult and toilsome, all the more so as we try to start a debate referring to a subject which still causes reticence and restraint on the level of public opinion and political leadership, integrally influencing the decisive level of Romanian society. By dissociating from such a residual outlook, we engage, synthetically and concisely, to dedicate a heightened attention to this theme, daring to enter the highly controversial universe of Romanian-Russian relations, starting from the premise that any initiative of approaching this subject proves a real challenge.

Therefore, by attributing an exciting connotation to this theme, we propose, on the basis of punctual and explicit reasoning, without the pretense of exhaustiveness, to personify this interlude of events of Romanian-Russian connections specific to the years 2000-2004, qualified in official discourse as "emblematic."^[1] while stating that, and this argument will be advanced throughout the paper, in current Romanian-Russian casuistry we cannot detect any concrete message of rectification of these relations, „the sporadic attempts at

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[1] V.Buga, "The Romanian-Russian Relations : Stage and Prospects", In: *Occasional Papers*, Nr. 2, 2003, Nato House, p.12.

relaunching are annulled by erroneous signals on a political level, or abandoned half-way, as proof of the lack of interest in finalising the proposed actions”^[2].

Furthermore, as is ostentatiously indicated by the suggestive title we have chosen, in the plans of projections for reestablishing a *modus vivendi* between Romania and the Russian Federation, the unilateral availability of the Romanian part prevailed without question, “with Russia not being interested in a preferable way of nominating reports with its partner in negotiations”^[3]. Still, we adhere to the belief that, with the present episode under a supervising grid, it is distinguished within the recent landscape of Romanian-Russian relationships, constituting an incipient but useful reference point for understanding the underlining cause of the relationship between Romania and the Russian Federation and indispensable in supplying the most optimal suggestions of unlocking the entire bilateral process.

2. The immediate evolution of Romanian-Russian relations. Stage and Prospects.

The meticulous reconstruction of the principal events consubstantial with the immediate dimension of Romanian-Russian relations is not an effortless one, more so because we are referring to the most complex bilateral relations that Romania is managing on its agenda of external politics, relations that bear an atypical portaiture, discontinuous and even syncopated, being qualified in professional semantics as a „sum of paradoxes”^[4] or a „unity of anthagonisms”^[5]. Based on this reference of real cognitive and exegetical interest, forming the following pertinent interogation appears naturally: Do we, at this time, acknowledge the existence of an axis on the Romania-Russian Federation coordinates? Deductively, and, seeing as how, statistically, the current Romanian-Russian balance is foreshadowed in a catastrophic format, an objective of this scale can not even be taken into account, even the valence of an axis via Bucharest-Moscow is redundant. Fragmented rather than liniar, the Romanian-Russian relationship has unraveled and continues to presently unravel in a sinuous and imprecise manner with little concrete signals of mutual cooperation, obviously contrasting with the perpetual periods of recoil and suspension. It particularly borders on an ambivalent mistrust, subordinate to a convulsed history, encumbered by light and shadow, responsible for shaping these relations.

In retrospect, the beginning of the 90’s found Romania and the Soviet Union (now Russia) on radically diverging positions, meanwhile both countries were facing a series of issues inherent to the “system changes initiated by the implosion and collapse of the communist regimes throughout Central and Eastern Europe”^[6], consciously controlling the particular desire of each country to reschedule the political, legal, economic and social requirements in accordance with the new stated requirements. However, outlining a strategy for a foreign policy that foresaw the “formalization of the relations with the great neighbor from the East”^[7] on the basis of the “recalibration of the bilateral legal settings”^[8], can be noticed, representing on an exclusively ideational level an immutable prerogative in the scenery of all the effort that was necessary to develop the

[2] C. Hărsan, “Romania- Russia whereto (V)?”, In: *Free Romania*, November 26 2007, Available at :<http://www.romanalibera.ro/a112277/romania-rusia-incotro-iii.html>, Accessed: November 13, 2009.

[3] R. Ivan, “L’ombre de L’empire. Les Rapports de la Roumanie a la Russie, 1991-2006”, In : *Romanian Political Science Review*, Volume. VIII, Nr. 3, 2008, pp.527-528.

[4] C. Hlihor, “Romania and its vicinity after the close of the Cold War” In: *The Annals of Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University*, Series History – New Series, Year 1, Nr. 1, 2010, p.194, Available at :<http://istorie.ucdc.ro/7.%20Revista%20PDF%20files/Analele%20UCDC%20Istorie%201%202010%20Pdf%20autor%20Hlihor.pdf>, Accessed: March 12 2011.

[5] For more details can be accessed the Conference Organized with the Occasion of “ Celebrating 130 years of Romanian-Russian Diplomatic Relations, available at : <http://rostov.mae.ro/index.php?lang=ro&id=31&s=71714>

[6] I. Iliescu, *The Romanian Revolution*, Bucharest, National Press Publishing, 2001, pp. 8-11. For more information regarding the 1989 events can be consulted a rich bibliography on this subject: V. Tismăneanu, *The 1989 Revolutions between the past and the*

future, Iasi, Polirom Publishing, 1999; A.Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, New York, HarperCollins Publishing, 2009; J. Rothschild, *Back to Diversity, The political history of the Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War*, Bucharest, Antet Publishing,1997; F. Thom, *The End of Communism*, Iasi, Polirom Publishing, 1996.

[7] *International Journal*, December 19, 1990.

[8] A.Năstase, *Romania after Malta*, Volume 4, Bucharest, The Titulescu European Foundation Publishing, 2007, p.23

most appropriate ways of boosting the relations. This was a strategy which, though widely supported and accepted, failed lamentably, feeling accordingly, "the absence of a pragmatic and intuitive vision"^[9] what the formulation, establishment and providing a clear and coherent goal is concerned, which is destined to imprint a redefined soulful feel to the relationship, essential in the context of the reconsideration and lucid review of these reports. Officially, the focus was on the principle of a policy of forms without substance, based on the inference of projections and purely assertive goals, ignoring, mostly out of inertia, immobility and even unconcern, the really fruitful opportunities profiled towards harmonizing these relationships. The well known episode of signing the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Romania and the USSR"^[10] took place on a purely declarative level. This episode has not managed to record the much awaited bilateral progress, in spite of the success based on a document that was "overwhelmingly positive, and that reflected both the metamorphoses carried out politically, economically and socially in both countries, and the processes developed in the European dimension and the international relationships"^[11]. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation had been conceived with the purpose of identifying in a legal formula, a new type of relation between Romania and the Soviet Union.

The treaty was praised by some and criticized by others and it created an inevitable decline on a bilateral level because of two obvious reasons: first, based on a vague clause, inserted in Article 4, had the document been ratified, it would have obstructed the legal right of Romania to opt for the desired security alliances, by "mortgaging the future of the Romanian state in the area of interest of the Soviet Union for a period of 15 years"^[12]. Secondly, the moment of the signing of the treaty was inconvenient, because the internal issues of the Soviet Union which "resulted with the August 1991 coup and afterwards with the dissolution of the heterogeneous conglomerate of the USSR in December 1991"^[13], prevented fundamentally the ratification of the international document. The inability to find a solution of compromise in a bilateral formula has reiterated again "at the same time with the arrival of Evgheni Primakov, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, on April 28th 1995 at Bucharest, when the attempt of concluding the basic treaty between the two states was struck by the incongruent opinions regarding the changes made in the document, inadvertences that inevitably lead to the ceasing of negotiations and implicitly to not signing and not approving the treaty"^[14], influencing thereby the ulterior development of the Romanian – Russian relations in a counterproductive way. The final result of the most troublesome and long debate rounds regarding the much expected international document, has finally been materialized on "July 4th 2003, when the two contractual parties gave their agreement about signing the Treaty on friendly and cooperative relations between Romania and the Russian Federation, prefacing the basis of an open and durable cooperation on all levels of mutual interest"^[15]. The signing of the Romanian - Russian treaty was possible also due to the relatively favorable setting, which was prone to an early recovery and normalization of relations, "so that the beginning of the year 2000 confirmed notable evolution and recorded a rising trend in the relationship with the Russian Federation"^[16]. Official messages were sent in the direction of a bilateral collaboration "both through the formalization of a significant number of visits at the state level and by enhancing economic exchanges"^[17], which is an eloquent testimony to the availability of both parties to give depth to the bilateral relations. Unfortunately, not even this short referential interlude, deserving as it may be in some respects, could not

^[9] A. Severin, G. Andreescu, *The place where Europe is build*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2000, p.195.

^[10] The Signing of The Treaty of Collaboration, Good Neighborhood and Friendship was officiated at 5 April 1991 with the purpose of formalizing the judicial framework between Romania and the Soviet Union.

^[11] I. Iliescu, *Moments of History, Documents, Speeches, Comments, June 1990-September 1991*, Bucharest, Encyclopaedical Publishing, 1996, pp.251-252.

^[12] S. Papacostea, "The End of a Tyranny and the Beginning of a Historical Mystification. Revelations of an ignored document". In : *22 Revue*, Nr.52+1, December 21 2010-January 3 2011, p.12.

^[13] The gradual dissolution of the Soviet Union, happened because the Union was composed of several republics that began after the 90's to proclaim their freedom and their independence. For more information regarding this subject can be consulted the book: V. Buga, *The Down of an Empire. The Soviet Union in the Gorbachev Epoch 1985-1991*, Bucharest, The National Institute for the Totalitarian Study Publishing, 2007.

^[14] M. Dinu, *42 years of Diplomacy, Ambassador under four Presidents*, Bucharest, C.H.Beck Publishing, 2009, p.209.

^[15] *The Romanian Chronicle*, July 5, 2003.

^[16] I. Motoc, S. Cioculescu, *Analytical Manual of Foreign Policy*, Iasi, Polirom Publishing, 2010, p.66.

^[17] I. Chifu, "The long path from dialogue to cooperation", In: *Occasional Papers*, Nr. 2, 2003, Nato House , p.26.

minimize the ballast of a bilateral convulsed past, marked by trauma, and causing a precipitated delay of the main actions with constructive and pragmatic potential, in plain process of development. The situation of the treaty was identical. Perceived as a precedent in the Romanian-Russian relations by the deliberate will of both parties to legislate a document of international law considered to be “a unitary aggregate with extraordinary political and judicial significance”^[18], and mostly “through enhanced attention attributed to the economic dimension, which is essential for the development at the highest possible level of the commercial exchanges and the balance of payments in a manner that is mutually advantageous”^[19], the treaty has managed to finalize the anticipated goals only partially. The document was individualized by its symbolic gesture, which is purely rhetorical and without any content, rather than by the actual steps that were taken.

“The historical contentious inherent to the bilateral equation was sent to the subsidiary under a joint political statement of the Secretaries of State, a statement without any legal value”^[20]. The demonetization in the most eloquent manner of the historical-litigious portfolio, revealed in a dichotomous way, the tacit acceptance of Romania regarding the marginalization really pressing issues in relation to the Russian Federation, and “Russia’s obstinacy in its imperial tradition and the iron principle according to which no concession is acceptable for Russia, but all the concessions are binding for its partners”^[21]. This compromise was possible because Romania had promoted the logics of the self - derogation of its own claims in favor of the desires and demands stated by the partner of negotiations, granting the favor to the Russian Federation, in order to boost the recovery of the Romanian – Russian dialogue. The reverence policy, implemented at Romania’s request, has firstly meant the development and conceptualization of the optimal and most efficient ways of releasing the bilateral process by any means, and with the price of repeated concessions, with the intention of solving one of the most sore and painful bilateral chapters, a non-existing praxis in the calculation of Russian foreign policy. Fundamentally, the absence of a compact and unified strategy through the attendance and involvement of both parties, had been acutely felt, thus creating an unfavorable climate in the bilateral relations plan, a climate in which the lack of pragmatism, lucidity and respect for national interest, had had its toll on the further development of the relations.

3. The Romanian – Russian relation, an obsessive – compulsive relation.

Understanding the subtlety of the preeminent, dissonant registry, specific for the bilateral Romanian - Russian relation, implies the foresight of those elements and factors which contribute to determining this predominant feature. With such a vision, we consider that one of the priority elements that prefigure this mainly negative paradigm is represented by self-perception, which means the way in which the two states relate to a self -configured and individualized profile. In Russia’s case, the self - imposed image astounds “under a stereological matrix, the calling of imperialism represents the axiomatic landmark the Russian Federation aspires and relates to constantly”^[22]. For the Russian Federation, the imperialistic destiny first means greatness, legitimacy of decision and the option to selectively and preferentially choose the partners of negotiation, opting for alliances which provide unilateral advantages and benefits. Under these circumstances, a geo-strategic, intransigent, pragmatic and calculated profile emerges, where there is no room for compromise. At the other end, Romania considers itself to be relatively objective, evaluating its existent potential and preferring to formalize a strategy for multi-vector and undifferentiated foreign policy, which is channeled towards the majority of the states, with the intention to gain legitimacy on the international scene, while sketched profile consists of a concessive and tolerant shape. Based on these references, it can be most eloquently noticed what kind of factors hinder the normalization of the Romanian – Russian relations. In conclusion, we can argue that as long as the Russian Federation practices an overrating policy in relation to its negotiation partner, it is very unlikely that the current stage of the relations can advance in the right direction, while perpetual tension and discord prevail in both countries.

[18] *The National Courier*, July 6, 2003.

[19] *The Morning*, July 5, 2003.

[20] F. Abraham, *Romania’s Transformation 1989-2006. The role of the external factors*, Bucharest, The National Institute for The Totalitarian Study Publishing, 2006, p.202.

[21] *The Day*, November 2, 2001.

[22] I. Bădescu, “Alexander Daughin The Russian Geopolitics and the Orthodox Geopolitics”, In : *Geopolitics*, Nr. 1, 2002, p.5.

At present, a policy of synergy between Romania and the Russian Federation is a necessity, but the accomplishment of such a bold objective signifies primary, a process of assumption, acceptance and forgiveness of the overwhelming historical inheritance, an inheritance that is characterized by a sum of versatile events that still encumber the incipient opportunities of cooperation that occur. Towards normal, pragmatic and fruitful relations between Romania and The Russian Federation, the historical reconciliation is vital. Accepting with dignity the long history of mistrust and hostility can lead to the expected normalization of bilateral relations and even to an enhancement of cooperative ties. Assuredly, the stake relies in the mutual capacity to erase the historical past and to crystallize new bridges of convergence based on respect, equity, tolerance and understanding.

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