

Ghenghea, Mircea-Cristian

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ROMANIA AND THE EURASIAN UNION. PLANS, PREDICTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Mircea-Cristian GHENGHEA*

Abstract: *Following the events in Ukraine, Romania might represent one of the key points for the Eurasian perspectives that have circulated in the last years in Moscow. Through our text we intend to present and to highlight the main ideas and plans of Eurasian inspiration regarding Romania, as well as the interesting predictions made, in certain moments, by some representative characters for the Eurasian paradigm, like Aleksandr Dugin, for instance, who is its main ideologist and promoter. At the same time, one must not neglect the signals of discontent from Moscow about the need of dissipating the so-called sanitary cordon of the Western powers, in which the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania are included – another aspect bearing a particular importance for understanding certain gestures, attitudes and statements related to the role and the place of the Eurasian Union.*

Keywords: Eurasian Union; Romania; Aleksandr Dugin

JEL Classification: F50; F53; F54

Introduction

The date of January 1st, 2015 marked the beginning of the official existence of the supranational body entitled the Eurasian Union. Discretely announced, without the usual ceremonies and pomp which used to accompany this kind of things, the event was soon to be thrown into the background due to various tragic situations which occurred at the beginning of this year. Nevertheless, in spite of all sceptics and criticism (Boonstra, 2014), the Eurasian Union designed and initiated by Russia has become reality. Including the Russian Federation, Belarus and Kazakhstan, the supranational body is intended to be a powerful economic and political counterweight against the European Union and the United States of America. Given that the leaders in Moscow are planning to regain at least a part of the influence that Russia had during the Soviet times, the South-Eastern Europe seems to bear a particular importance, a fact which can also be noticed by considering the way in which the process of establishing the Eurasian Union was designed and promoted.

* PhD in the Research Department of the Faculty of History within Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: mcghenghea2010@yahoo.com



1. Romania – the policy of certainty

A general opinion shows that Ukraine represented a key-piece for the plan of the Eurasian Union. Therefore, its absence from this organism was perceived as a potential threat by the Russian Federation and constituted an important vulnerability for the Eurasian project.

While it is true that the European option of Ukraine irritated Russia, it is also true that the potential dismemberment of Ukraine was taken into consideration even since the end of the '90s, as one can see/read within the writings of Aleksandr Dugin, the main ideologist and promoter of the Eurasian plans. Under these circumstances, Romania gained a particular importance, both from the point of view of the European Union's plans (with a certain reference to the situation of the Eastern Partnership) and especially of the United States and NATO. Given that, during 2014, the situation in countries like Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary was rather agitated and discomforting, politically and economically wise, Romania represented a sort of oasis of tranquillity in a rough sea, a reliable partner for the European Union, the United States of America and NATO.

The regional stability was possible due to the bilateral and multilateral cooperation process between Romania and its traditional or newest allies. The internal justice mechanisms which began to unfold quite an impressive number of investigations and inquires, in order to fight the institutionalized corruption also contributed to the general improvement of Romania's image abroad and offered serious reasons to consider that Western economic and political interests might benefit from this. In spite of the contradictions and disputes between the representatives of certain Romanian political parties, a number of high-ranking officials and prominent administrative figures were brought to justice.

Mainly due to the conflict in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine the regional security background shifted in an almost radical way. The European Union, NATO, but especially the neighbouring member states of the conflict zone like Romania, Poland, Hungary, or Slovakia should be prepared for any turn of events. The Western presence increased over the last year in the Baltic States, several common military exercises took place there and also in Romania, Poland, and even Ukraine. Nevertheless, Romania's membership of the European Union and NATO has done much for the country's stability and security in South-Eastern Europe, a region which, historically speaking, is practically prone to turbulence.

2. Romania, Aleksandr Dugin, and the Eurasian plans

When discussing the issue of the Eurasian Union and Romania one must not forget that Romania has been assigned the role of a true bridge between the East-Slavic area and certain states of South-Eastern Europe – Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Hungary. The fact as such has already been mentioned by various promoters of the Eurasianist ideas. Situated in the South-Eastern part of the European continent, perhaps in the most exposed flank of the European Union, in connection with countries where there is a certain degree of sympathy for Russia, like Serbia or Bulgaria, Romania represents an area where Russia would definitely prefer to have a greater influence.

Another coordinate that can make us understand better the increasing attention towards our region is represented by the particular significance which Romania gained after the Crimean Peninsula became a part of the Russian Federation. As the United States Navy almost concluded the organization and the arrangements of the Deveselu base in order to install the already famous missile shield elements, Moscow was more than displeased and frustrated, a fact proved not only by an entire series of statements, but also by bringing troops, as well as hunting and bombardment aircrafts at various airbases in Crimea (Pircalabu, 2015).

Finally, another issue that may have greater relevance in the near or more distant future is that the Romanian state is quite an inconvenient geopolitical actor for Russia in the Black Sea; representing not only its national interests, but at the same time those of the European and North-Atlantic allies, Romania may also play a certain role when discussing the pipelines and the transit of natural gas between the two major geopolitical zones – Eurasian and Occidental.

These are but a few aspects that might explain the attention which the Russian Federation, on one hand, and the United States of America, NATO, and the European Union, on the other hand, pay to the situation in Romania. However, it has become obvious that Kremlin's media and image offensive in various European countries, including Romania, has increased in intensity in the last few years (Campeanu, 2015), perhaps a proper example being the recent opening of the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Bucharest (15 May 2015).

In this context, we should not be surprised that the main ideological exponent of contemporary Eurasianism, namely Aleksandr Dugin, has made several statements and predictions regarding the future of Romania and its possible inclusion within the Eurasian sphere of influence. The invocation of certain cultural affinities and an ancient heritage, which constitutes a synthesis between Western and Oriental civilization coordinates, represents one of the favourite and quite often used arguments. Moreover, in the preface of the Romanian edition of his book *The Foundations of Geopolitics*,

Aleksandr Dugin shows that “in the Romanian-Russian cultures’ dialogue one should consider the Euroasianist doctrine, which is independent but, through the differences, diversity, and proportions it disposes and gives us a solid basis for approach, mutual understanding, and friendship” (Dugin, 2011, p. 13).

According to Dugin, Romania and other Central and East-European countries like Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania are trapped within the so-called Atlanticist paradigm, which would actually enforce the position of the United States of America and Great Britain.

Aleksandr Dugin noticed correctly that states having the size and importance of Romania cannot have their own geopolitics – these states gain geopolitical importance by being included in a large alliance or political and military block. As a consequence, Romania is capable of manifesting itself only as a power with limited interests, of local and regional significance, its foreign policy being unavoidably subordinated to the strategic interests of the alliances and organizations of which she is a part of – the European Union and NATO.

In the last few years, Dugin predicted several times the inevitable decay of the European Union and the ascension of the Eurasian Union. When talking about Romania, he usually outlined its possible Eurasian integration and deplored the treatment of Romanians like second-hand European citizens, as he did during an interview in Moscow back in 2013:

Romania is on the periphery of the European Union, it is an uninvited guest, treated worse than the countries which are in difficulty like Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland. In the European Union these countries are labelled pejoratively as the “PIIGS”, meaning “the group of pigs”. Does it mean, in this context, that Romania is a country of the tenth hand? There is a negative and unjust perception of Romanians in Europe. They are not welcomed as guests. They are not allowed in the Schengen space. An entire nation is judged on the basis of a few corruption cases. It is an unseemly situation for a country which possesses a great Orthodox culture, a culture which I consider to be a real pearl of the European culture of the 19th-20th centuries. In reality, the Romanian society is one of the European societies which are the most interesting, intellectual, closest to us (Mandrasescu, 2013).

Aleksandr Dugin warned against the possibility of using the Romanian nationalism by the Western powers, considering that “playing with the patriotic feelings of the Romanians, the operators

of the world geopolitics will try to achieve their specific goals” (Dugin, 2011, p. 17). Ironically, he is absolutely right here as he himself has fully proved it several times when talking about that.

Sometimes, the mentioning of Romania and the eventual integration within the Eurasian Union was accompanied by the indication of the possible unification of the Republic of Moldova and Romania: “by entering this union, Romania might unite with Moldova in which Transnistria would re-integrate”. One big happy family, as the Americans would say. Yet, despite the extraordinary generosity that he shows when discussing the possible unification of the two Romanian states, the members of the family would still be those already known and heavily promoted by the former Soviet propaganda and by the actual supporters of Moldovenism and Moldavian statehood, as even Aleksandr Dugin stated in Moscow, in 2013:

The paradigm of the unavoidable approach is determined by many factors. Russians, Romanians, Moldovans, Transnistrians – they are all Orthodox, they are bound by the same regional space that might also become a common economic space and a common Eurasian platform where everyone will find an honourable place (Mandrasescu, 2013).

At the beginning of 2015, following the official appearance of the Eurasian Union, Dugin made another statement in which he “outlined his extraordinary vision of merging Central and East European countries into one big conglomerate as well as offering a rare criticism of Putin” (Tóth, 2015), as Dugin seems to be fallen out of Russian president’s favour in the last year. This statement was made in an interview given to Alfahír, a Jobbik-affiliated online news outlet and might be regarded as a part of Dugin’s efforts to internationally promote “his Eurasian theory within radical right-wing circles” (Tóth, 2015). This “extraordinary” vision consists (nothing new, after all!) in creating a sort of supranational body in order “to reunite the former crown lands of Hungary in a kind of Eastern European super state”. Naturally, all the countries involved (Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Austria, and also a part of Ukraine – the Volinski oblast) would lose their national sovereignty and the Eurasian dependence would be implicit.

Conclusions

One must be aware that all the Eurasianist ideas and arguments mentioned in our text represent only variations of the same issue: the attempt of Russia to regain the influence and the status it had

during the Soviet times. For achieving this, the leaders in Kremlin seem to be capable of almost anything, including a fratricidal war against Ukraine, a situation which was practically unconceivable by most Ukrainians and Russians alike.

At the moment, the Eurasian Union plan seems to be on hold, on account of the economic sanctions that Russia must bear. However, it is also true that the Eastern Partnership is in a very delicate and difficult position and the European expectations of Ukraine and Republic of Moldova have almost no chances of being fulfilled in the near future, as the Summit in Riga in May 2015 has already proved.

For Romania, the very idea of becoming a member of the Eurasian Union seems to be a science-fiction thing. As a member of the European Union and NATO, Romania suddenly gained a greater importance for both these organizations following the events in Ukraine. It also constitutes a very interesting target for the Russian Federation in its attempt of creating a regional propaganda network and counteracting the initiatives and actions of the Western powers. The simple fact that Romania is officially leading a NATO-backed project meant to improve Ukraine's cyber-defence (Popescu, 2015) says quite a lot about the role that the Romanian state has in terms of regional security.

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