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Introductory study. Europe in a changing world: opportunities and challenges

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A new world order, induced by the reality in which we live, imposes on researchers the difficult task of bringing little clarity to contemporary society, "thus contributing to balancing global conditions of play." (Harary, 2018: 9). In other words, we live in a world that is already very different from the one we had begun to understand. And certainly, until we can grasp with our minds and learn the new reality, today's reality, the world will most likely be drastically different, in a way that at the moment may seem inconceivable. „Discontinuity is the central reality of our contemporary history, and that demands an intensified debate regarding the meaning of our era” (Brzezinski, 1993:10). Our inability to perceive the broader ramifications of the present deepens society's fears for what is to come and how well we should relate. The collapse of established values over time makes its presence felt especially in the advanced parts of the world. Totalitarian doctrines have so far been discredited, which is to be applauded. But a prolongation in time of our feelings in recent months, generated by this virus, Sars Covid 19, how will it influence the global political situation today and tomorrow? How global society in general will be affected. What about the economy? What awaits us next? How is the European Union evolving in this time of pandemic? What will be the future of this supranational structure? And the series of questions and dilemmas could go on and on.

After the solidarity of the Member States of the European Union has been tested, I am referring here only to some of the trials it has been subjected to in the 21st century: the economic crisis of 2008-2011, the refugee crisis of 2014 onwards, which has shaken the peace again. Union, through the thousands of emigrants who came here especially through the southern gates, Greece and Italy. I cannot help but think of the effects of the latter crisis within the states that have opened their doors. We have the example of Germany, which has faced great repercussions in its domestic policy and in society. However, the most serious repercussion was the closure of the intra and extra European borders, but also the undeniable contribution regarding BREXIT. The UK has said it will never be able to control immigration unless it leaves the European Union, as freedom of movement gives other EU citizens the automatic right to live in the UK. (Orășanu). The idea was also blamed on the increase in crime in the Kingdom. On the other hand, European policies aimed at an "ever closer union" with a view to deeper economic integration (Chiriac, 2017:147) were seen as a threat to the sovereignty of the British Parliament.

In any case, the crisis triggered by BREXIT called into question the identity and values of the European Union. This issue has sparked concerns since the onset of the crisis, both in the minds of researchers in various fields of science and in the minds of politicians. As early as March 2017, at the Rome Summit, Juncker called on the 27 European leaders to show unity and leadership. The 30 pages of the White Paper set out the scenarios for the future of a united Europe. The five possible options Juncker was talking about ranged from limiting the EU to a single market to the option of a federalist Europe (Juncker, 2017).

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The volume we bring to the readers' attention today, through the diversity of topics addressed, reflects beyond the quality of the analyzes assumed, the undoubted appreciation of fellow professors and researchers, from home and abroad, to the work of over 40 years of our colleague and professor Ioan Horga, at the beautiful age of 65. The works in the fields of history, law, political science, international relations, sociology, etc., are grouped into three parts, which have in common the European Union, starting from the national dimension of some Member States and continuing with interconnections in states, in various aspects, from political to economic, cultural, etc.

EU – values, identities and influences

The European Union represents today a macro-regional structure with unique characteristics in the world, which has enough power to globally promote its economic interests, but encounters problems at political level regarding the capacity to exercise leadership.

The uniqueness of the European Union's regional governing system is insured by the following characteristics (Lane, 2012: 51):

- a political system with own legislative, executive and judiciary structure;
- a lower autonomy of the Member States, as a result of the legislative harmonization determined by the adoption of the "Community acquis";
- the implementation of a decision-making system within which each Member State exercises a considerable influence using *soft* and *hard* coordination methods;
- the clear identification of regional competences;
- the determination of the States' influence degree at government and parliamentary level;
- the distancing from the principle of humanity, which generates very high transaction costs in the case of other regional organizations.

If initially the European Union was constituted as a response to globalization, out of the wish to profit from its advantages and to counteract the power and influence of other regional poles, through the characteristics, structures and relations it has created on the path of its evolution, this transformed in a powerful stimulus of the globalization process, representing a symbol of liberalisation, a global actor at economic, social and political level. The strategic position of the UE on the global stage is one of "power beyond power", associated to the concepts of "civil" or "normative" power, according to which it uses the forms of civil or normative influence to convince the others and to determine them to act in accordance with its purpose and actions (Dee, 2015: 33). The instruments used by the EU in order to accomplish this role at international level are persuasion and communication, and its style in the multilateral negotiations is a *soft* one oriented towards consensus.

EU's position and image in the world still is the subject of lively debates. Due to the fact that the European Union is not an ordinary state, but a complex and multidimensional organization, its structure, policies, actions and strategies can create confusion for the outside environment. In her analysis related to the measure in which the EU is perceived as leader in world politics, Sonia Lucarelli presents the strengths and weaknesses of the EU's global leadership (Lucarelli, 2014: 45-64). The author considers as positive the perceptions of the EU as model of regional integration, global economic power and promoter of human rights, development and multilateralism (thanks to its own values), while the negative perceptions are related to the inconsistency between EU's policies and attitude in the diplomatic negotiations (being perceived as having a subordinate position to the USA). Its *soft* style of negotiation is appreciated in some cases, but at the same time it is criticised, being considered much too weak or denoting a condescending attitude. According to Lucarelli, there is an obvious discrepancy between recognizing EU's leadership potential (from the economic perspective and that of the values) and the perception of leadership that manifests itself in real life, the EU being perceived as unable to transform itself from a potential leader into a real one.

The integration into such a macro-region with unique features and history, entails the fulfillment of several categories of criteria, some imposed by European institutions; some coming from the tradition, as well as the cultural and historical evolution of Old Europe nations. Thus, economic, political, and judicial norms are intertwined with cultural and democratic values promoted along the European construction process (Şoproni, 2016: 348).

The complex system of norms and values mentioned above actually forms the European identity, which ensures regional cohesion, but at the same time determines the fragility of the connections between its members and functional imbalances (generated by incompatibilities, overlaps or even conflicting speeches and actions from regional or state actors). Even so, the entirety of European principles and policies express the idea that the frontiers of Europe, be they internal or external, "are limits of cooperation and not of separation" (Bărbulescu, 2006: 450), they are "open" frontiers with important implications on the nature of the EU as a political community (Anderson and Bort, 2001: 113).

Regional cooperation and European borders

At EU level, cross-border cooperation was discussed only in 1980, under the European Framework Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation of Territorial Communities or Authorities, signed in Madrid on 21 May 1980 (European Framework Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation). In doing so, the Council of Europe seeks to ensure the participation of Europe's local authorities or territorial authorities in cooperating with local authorities or territorial authorities on issues such as regional, urban and rural development, environmental protection, improving infrastructure and services for citizens and helping each other. Considering that experience has shown that the co-operation of Europe's local and regional powers is such as to enable them to better fulfill their mission, that it is particularly likely to contribute to the development and development of frontier regions, which are determined to promote this cooperation as much as possible and thus contribute to the economic and social progress of border regions and to the solidarity that unites the peoples of Europe (European Framework Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation).

The magnitude of the interest in cross-border cooperation is most likely due to the establishment of the European Single Market and the developments towards democracy registered by the Central and Eastern European states.

According to researchers, cross-border cooperation involves the classic mutual relationship between two neighboring border regions. It covers all areas of daily life, the development of common programs and takes into account the convergence of priorities and actions on both sides of the border, being a response to common challenges. Its strong point is the extensive participation of social groups, various administrative levels, etc., and the principles of cross-border cooperation are: vertical and horizontal partnership with wide sphere, subsidiarity through the union and responsibility of regional and local levels, preparation of common cross-border development, but also the implementation of cross-border projects (Cross-border cooperation).

In support of these objectives, the EU institutions have set up assistance programs for cross-border, pre- and post-accession cooperation. The most complex first Community Structural Funds initiative is the INTERREG program. Extended in 2000-2006 with INTERREG III, it includes three types of cooperation: cross-border, transnational, interregional. The initiative is a key priority of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the European Union's European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and aims to strengthen relations between EU Member States. "Fifteen cross-border programs (nine at land borders, three at sea and three along sea basins) have been set up along the eastern and southern borders of the European Union with a total funding of € 1,118.434 million over a period for seven years, between 2007-2013" (Cross-border cooperation, a priority of the European Union).

Therefore, the process of cross-border cooperation constitutes an essential instrument that provides the framework and the necessary resources for the development of regions and for increasing their capacity to attract human and financial resources. Cross-border cooperation is therefore an attractive option for developing countries, as it increases the capacity of these countries to attract foreign direct investment and offers the possibility of progressive liberalization, which allows for the reduction of certain adjustment costs and political impediments associated with this process. It allows the countries concerned, to integrate more easily into the global economy, and the fact that states were those that have been willing to participate in regional agreements, proves that these agreements are complementary to the process of globalization (Bowles, 2002: 86-87). From this perspective, cooperation provides the means that allow regional actors to enter the global economy, as it leads to the formation of structures that reproduce the conditions of global governance at regional level (Nesadurai, 2005: 158).

The regionalization processes (including of course, cross-border cooperation actions and projects) generate the transformation of the frontier from demarcation line into a connecting axis between the state and non-state actors of a region, which will act together so that their region to become globally competitive.

So, through the concept of cross-border cooperation, the European Union promotes co-operation between its Member States, both at the internal and at the external borders. Cooperation uses a range of financing tools and projects to support border regions located on the internal and external borders. This form of cooperation has been driven by the increasing permeability of the frontiers, induced by globalization, and by the need for regions to increase their attractiveness and competitiveness in order to develop and impose themselves in the global competition.

The cross-border partnerships created by the Union's regional policy led to the formation of cross-border regions that aim mainly to attract investors, tourists and residents to contribute to the growth and development of their economic and social status (Şoproni et al., 2017: 50). The cross-border regions „represent specific forms of innovation in relation to space, place, and scale. They involve the production of new types of place or space for producing, servicing, working, and consuming. They are linked with new methods of place or space production to create location-specific advantages for producing goods and services and offer new regulatory structures, infrastructures, scale economies, new labour markets” (Jessop, 2003: 188).

Romania in a European context

If we talk about regionalization, cross-border cooperation, development and integration of Central and Eastern European states, we must refer to the major role that Romania plays in this context. EU Member State since 2007, our country has gone through all the stages from marginalization to membership without difficulty. Entry was the latest and most momentous stage in the country's involvement in the process of European integration . It also signaled acceptance by the majority of its European partners of the progress Romania has made in its postcommunist transformation from authoritarian dictatorship and near economic collapse to a modern democracy with a functioning market economy (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2016: 16). In doing so, it brought an end to the process of eastern enlargement launched at the Copenhagen European Council more than a decade earlier in June 1993 (European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993).

With the completion of this process, the EU has shown that it is capitalizing on the geopolitical role of Central and Eastern Europe. Equally, the British, Americans, Germans and Russians saw the strategic importance of this transition region (Spykman, 1944) between East and West for the balance of power (Naumescu, 2019: 15). "Whoever controls Rimland dominates Eurasia and whoever dominates Eurasia rules the world," said the same international relations professor Spykman, in the paper already quoted.

After 1989, the Americans in turn discovered the stakes of the region, becoming for the first time in history a significant presence in the region. NATO enlargement after 1999 and the EU are undoubted strategic triumphs for the West. In recent years, the involvement of China and Russia's efforts to regain its past role have been clearly seen in the context of the new world order. The stakes for power of the regional competition are increasing, and Romania has its role in this context (Marga, 2017; Kissinger, 2015).

On the other hand, Romania has a major role in consolidating the European project and at the same time in implementing the European strategic policies, as is the case of the EU Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, of the European Global Strategy, etc. (Romania's priorities in the EU).

Our full gratitude goes to our colleagues from the country and abroad, who contributed to the realization of this volume, on the one hand making available to our readers their scientific research, and on the other hand proving appreciation for the entire teaching activity and scientific study of the university professor Ioan Horga and at the same time the consideration for the human quality of his reign.

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