ROMANIA AND RUSSIA: WHAT DO WE KNOW AND DO WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT EACH OTHER?

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While I was working editing this volume, I was contacted, politely, by a central daily from Moscow, regarding an episode that took place in Bucharest. The editor from the Moscow’s newspaper Vzglyad asked me about a supposedly law project set forward by a deputy from Bucharest which envisioned the “immediate recognition of the citizens from the Republic of Moldova as Romanian citizens.” How does this request correlate – asked the journalist – with the “international legislation” and if it cannot be interpreted as “territorial pretentions of Romania toward the Republic of Moldova.”

I attempted to clarify the misunderstanding starting with the most flagrant aspect of the approach: we are not having here a law project, there was no such thing, for there was just a declaration, and that was a much nuanced one, along the public intervention of the deputy. I said, as following, that Romania is a member state of the European Union and – even if someone wanted the things to be different – it respects the spirit of the European and international legislation, inclusively from this point of view. Thus, Romania cannot admit to grant Romanian citizenship, “in mass,” to other citizens and obtaining Romanian citizenship is and individual act, as the citizenship is obtained by individual request, in conformity with the legislation of the countries involved, namely Romania and the Republic Moldova. Much more, the Romanian legislation in force is not even based on ethnicity, on the famous jus sanguinis that was so often discussed, at the beginning of the 90s, regarding the German legislation in question. As the Republic of Moldova admits double citizenship in what Romania is concerned, it also admits it without any differentiation, regarding the Russian Federation.

My answer was not satisfactory. The journalist in question communicated to me that her superior did not consider my answer adequate, since they had other sources, the newspaper believes differently and not what the interlocutor says. Overseeing the fact that when someone’s opinion is solicited it is only to hear what that person says or believes on the subject and not to confirm your personal “certainties” or idiosyncrasies, I cannot imagine, even today, what that newspaper wanted to hear from Bucharest on this delicate matter; but, obviously, not what I have said.

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This episode was for me significant and I had the sensation that the incident illustrates perfectly an aspect that we rarely come to be aware of: the problem is not as much what we know as it is what we want to know one about the others. The stake of the dialogue, in a first instance, stays in someone’s openness to dialogue. This impression was strengthened also by other episodes.

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Together with the ambassador Sergiu Celac, we are involved in an ample research programme, initiated in 2012 and entitled “Russia and Its Neighbours.” It is financed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation from Berlin, and the coordinator is the Russian expert Andrei Zagorschi. In the project, along Russia, take part also eight Central European states: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary. The fundamental idea is the elaboration, by the researchers from the participant states, of a series of common texts concerning the bilateral relation between Russia and each of the states involved in the project. The final result was intended to be a volume published in English and German.¹

We had on the path of unfolding this project the possibility to listen and read the Russian position concerning Romania in many common seminars and negotiations. In general there were no surprises. But neither results! We have been listening mostly what we have already known: an official vision toward Romania, which did not seem to be significantly changed during the last century. For the Russian part, Romania was always the usual suspect, the historical vision is abundantly politicized, so that the differentiation between the “official historiography” and the approaches of our colleague researchers from Moscow was distinguished with difficulty: the question of the thesaurus, practically is non-existent and it was not excepted any discussion on the matter, the interpretations on Bessarabia and, afterwards, on the Republic of Moldova, are entirely, the same as those in use before 1989. Nothing has changed, and everything seems frozen at the stage of project.² The position of the two Russian researchers from the State Institute for the International Relations (MGIMO) illustrated a position that has become, meanwhile, as well the academic version, as the official version. The pluralism of interpretations, the nuances and a kind of tonic academic disidence in comparison with the natural rigidity of the official version were unfortunately missing.

Here emerges the same problem: history is a burden, and the analytic pattern we mutually employ is pre-established a long time ago, clogged and jammed by the political declarations of the moment and deprived of any heuristic nuance. If we are not going to change it, we are going to continue to “know” one about the others what we “have already known” with at least two hundreds years ago...

¹ The final Policy Paper of the project can be consulted at http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09717.pdf. Regarding the session held in Berlin of the project see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apoPzDPJrE&feature=youtu.be (accessed June 2, 2013).

² A version of research from our Russian colleagues involved in the project – Victor Kikin and Igor Pushilin – “The Relations Between Romania and Russia after 1989 within the Context of the Political Priorities Between the Two Countries” – is available in the Russian language in the Bulletin of the State Institute for the International Relations, MGIMO, no. 2/2012 and it can be accessed on the site Perspectives, where it was published in July 6, 2012: http://perspektivy.info/sez/teorii/otnoshenija_rossii_i_rumynii_posle_1989_nostalgie_v_kontekste_vneshnepoliticheskikh_prioritetov_dvuh_sran_2012-07-06.htm (accessed June 2, 2013).
Unfortunately, this sensation hardly disappears and when we appeal to other
texts provided by the research environment from the Russian Federation. Extremely
rare, indeed, as rare are those who research methodically the subject represented
by Romania. The volume “Questions of National Strategy” of the Russian Institute
for Strategic Researches published in 2013 and posted afterwards, at March 5 on
the site Perspectives includes a wide material dedicated to Romania a entitled
“Romania: the Historical Fundament and the Present-Day Status of Its Foreign
Policy”. The members of the research team who elaborated this product are leading
researchers of this institute. The material is broadly documented, mainly with
historiography Russian sources, not at all iconoclastic against the already classicized
interpretations and not different as content from what I have already read.

For now, the veitable wall, not only in terms of communication, but in terms
of communicational good-will is still in place.

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This is the academic background against which, during the last years, the
political relation unfolds rigidly and almost blocked, with certain moments that
became, seen retrospectively, reputable exceptions. The last bilateral meeting of
the Romanian and respectively Russian official representatives took place
February 19, 2013 in Bucharest. In conformity to the official communicate beyond
the consecrated themes of the bilateral dialogue – the 10 years anniversary from
the signing of the treaty from July 4, 2003 concerning the friendly and cooperation
relations between the two states (celebrating 135 years of bilateral diplomatic
relations); the improvement of the political dialogue to a superior qualitative
level; opinion exchanges on themes such as EU – Russia and NATO – Russia
partnerships; the present stage and the perspectives identifying solutions in the
Transnistria conflict, the economic cooperation and the commercial exchanges
or the presentation of the evolutions related to the implementation of the
agreement concerning the emplacement on the Romanian territory of the Missile
Defence System – another idea emerged within the debates. The Romanian official
resumed the proposal to create a “bilateral forum of civil society”, that will “permit
a better knowledge of the two societies, respectively the development of the
interpersonal and civil society level relations”.

3 http://www.riss.ru/images/pdf/journal/2012/5/94_%D0%A0%D1%83%D0%BC%D1%8B%D0%B0
%D0%88%D0%B8.pdf (accessed June 2, 2013).
4 http://perspektivy.info/strefy/nuvnyaja_istoricheskie_istoki_i_sovremennoe_sostojanie_vneshnie
5 The co-ordinator was E.S. Khotkovo (Head of Research Department) and the team included other names
such as: S. M. Erminov, V.B. Kashiin, D. A. Maltsev and S. A. Mikhalev.
6 We are not going to go much into the history of this relation, because it is simply presented in the material
realized by Ambassador Sergiu Celic and myself, within the mentioned project of research. The text is going
to be published at the publishing house of the Institute of Political Science and International Relations of the
Romanian Academy next to the version of the Russian colleague researchers and other academic materials
resulted in the project managed by the Foundation Friedrich Ebert in Berlin.
7 The state secretary for strategic affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, had consultations with Vladimir Titov, vice-

minister for foreign affairs of the Russian Federation. The consultation round was the third reunion of this type
between the two official representatives after the consultations organized in Bucharest April 7, 2011 and at
Moscow, March 27, 2012.
Beyond the novel and provocative air (in the good connotation of the term) around this initiative – as shown by the “civil society” of a state which considers officially that the predilection headquarter of for the Western foe “agencies” is civil society? –, as an idea, it is worthy analyzing. From what we have suggested until now, not only the dialogue but also the good will for dialogue were absent up to now. This created a chain reaction of prejudices idiosyncrasies and an unhealthy dependency of the academic discourse on the political one.

However, we should not entertain illusions. When the political mechanism of relation between Russia and Romania is jammed at the highest level – and there are no chances that it will be unblocked until 2014 –, not the academic space is the one to unblocked as no other instance but the political one (economy, culture etc.) will realize it. Thus, the subject proposed entertains no illusion that it will change something radically, from this point of view. It also does not constitute the much necessary starting point to set the things on a normal track. We are afar. But, at least, it is an inclusive step toward a better collaboration at the level of academic institutions, where things have still much to improve.

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The attempt is worth realising. Not with the impression that it is imperiously necessary but with the idea that we cannot live, neither ones, nor the others, without it. Neither Russia, nor Romania has an existential stake in building a political relation that can be called “normal”. As we have been living until now, we are going to continue living.

But especially here emerges the possibility of another type of dialogue. Especially because we have no constraints, neither in terms of time, nor in other terms without strain and stubbornness the effort of a different kind of Romanian-Russian meeting is worthy to be pursued, at least out of a genuine academic curiosity, if not out of other reasons.

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Finally, we extend thanking words addressed to the participants in the first edition of the international conference “Romania and Russia: Perceptions, realities, perspectives.”

As well I express the gratitude from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations of the Romanian Academy to academicians Dan Berindei and to counsel minister of the Russian Federation Embassy at Bucharest, Evgeny Egorov, who, through their speeches opened the works of the conference.

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8 On this occasion, at the meeting trust was expressed that the activity of the Common Commission concerning the study of the problem emerged from the history of the bilateral relations inclusively the problem of the Romanian Thesaurus will be resumed with good results, as convened, at Moscow, in October 2012 by the co-Presidents of this bilateral forum. Yet, this did not take place.