



ORIGINAL PAPER

Romanian Post-Communism. Redefining Modernity and the Shortcomings of Communism

Tudor Urea¹⁾

Abstract:

The year 1989 marked in Romania the beginning of the renunciation of the communist ideology, and, as an arc over time, as more than a hundred years ago, the Romanian society is divided, this time, between the nostalgic of the communist regime and the pro-Europeans who support the path of development according to the Western European model. The processes of change after December 1989 have been permanently redefined in the last 30 years, leading at least temporarily to another type of societal organization, oscillating between capitalism and communism, between tradition and modernity, but with postmodern influences, between social democracy, conservatism and liberalism. Resolving the controversies and divergences between nostalgic and pro-Europeans related to the path that post-communist Romania must follow, requires the presence of a real public space for the manifestation of civil society. Currently, the Romanian elites do not have the capacity to produce and support a competitive social development. This is the reason why Romania imposes changes that do not have the support of the majority of society and which look like experiments whose effects are impossible to anticipate. Post-communist Romania is in a permanent societal redefinition that oscillates between capitalism and communism, between modernity and tradition. An active civil society in a real public space could be the solution for resolving the existing divergences in the actual Romanian society.

Keywords: *Romania; communism; modernity; political.*

¹⁾ PhD Student, University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, field of study History, Romania, Phone: (+40)743869062, Email: tudor_urea@yahoo.com.

Romanian Post-Communism. Redefining Modernity and the Shortcomings of Communism

Occurred in the Western area, first in Western Europe and then extended to North America, modernity has two related definitions, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. It is “the quality or condition of being modern; modernness of character or style” and “an intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favor of contemporary or radical values and beliefs (chiefly those of scientific rationalism and liberalism) values (Hunt 2008: 48; Franzén ***: 2).” The modernity could be perceived as the aspects of society that have been developed based on traditional values or ideas to be replaced by a modern equivalent, or the rejection of these traditional aspects in favor of new and modern ideas or.

The period in which our society had the best evolution, when the foundations of our modernization were laid, was that of the end of the 19th century, between the War of independence and the First World War. The formation of the Romanian nation, which culminated in the creation of Greater Romania, at the end of the First World War, was a complex process, but which was based on the prioritization of political goals, what today we call a country project. The creation of political institutions adequate to the requirements of the modern state, the Constitutions of 1866 and 1923, which provided the framework for the development of political life, firm guidance in both domestic and foreign policy, the transformation of an eminently agricultural economy into an economy based on industry and on the city requested the energies of successive generations of Romanians.

During this period, Western Europe will exert a decisive influence on Romanian political institutions and on the development of industry, which provoked an uninterrupted controversy among Romanian intellectuals between “pro-tradition current” who emphasized the country's agrarian character and the need to preserve the tradition and the “pro-European current” who supported the development path according to the European model. The establishment of the communist regime after the end of World War II will put an end to this controversy. Hitchens remarks that for more than forty years, from the late 1940s to 1989, it served as an ideological cover for a political and economic system that oriented Romania from Western Europe to the East (Hitchens 2013: 12). The path that Romania should follow was one of the fiercest controversies that had divided the Romanian intellectuals into two camps, and not since yesterday, but since the formation of the Romanian nation, until now.

The year 1989 marked in Romania the beginning of the renunciation of the communist ideology, and, as an arc over time, as more than a hundred years ago, the Romanian society is divided, this time, between the nostalgic of the communist regime and the pro-Europeans who support the path of development according to the Western European model. As Hitchens notes, those who want to resume the Western path face formidable obstacles, given that there are many who defend the tradition, and we can also talk about reminiscences of communism (Hitchens 2013: 13). Certainly, the past is in a structured correlation, but also symbolic with the present society. In the sense of Professor Levi-Strauss's conception, accumulated and fruitful time is considered a tradition in modern societies (Lévi-Strauss 1999: 31–32). The past, as part of common cultural knowledge, becomes a determining factor in national identities. In this sense, collective memory does not only mean knowledge, but it is a process, a mechanism, that characterizes societies, but also produces them, because through the prism of such a mechanism they are reorganized.

Post-communism is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the cultural or political

situation following or resulting from a period of communist government, now especially that of eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Chronologically, the Romanian post-communism, as described by Bogdan Voicu knows so far two stages: the transition and the post-transition (Voicu 2005: 18). The changes that take place during this period in Romania will profoundly affect social organization, ideologies, interpersonal relationships, values, which although they could not be avoided, were a part of natural social evolution, otherwise not always conducive to social progress. Like other post-communist societies, the Romanian one will follow the path of redefining modernity, defined by Constantin Schifirneț as social organization of Western origin, characterized by individualism, democracy, capitalism, secularism, balance, stability, and civil rights (Schifirneț 2009: 81). The trends in Western European societies will soon be taken over by imitation, contagion and less by planned change by the Romanian post-communist society. But the Romanian society will know its own modernity, inconsistent, slow, characterized by actions and ideas that remain partial and unfinished which Schifirneț calls “tendentious” (Schifirneț 2009: 85). The Romanian post-communist society characterized by a drifting economy, primarily concerned with political-institutional construction, has a consistent gap between the rapid pace of political, cultural, and intellectual modernization and the slow economic modernization that makes modernity, understood as a standard generated by the process of modernization in the West, to remain more of a trend than a record.

The pressure of change after 1990 has imposed a transition toward democracy that takes place at different levels and different speeds. As Daniel Barbu shows from the perspective of the tunnel parable, the Romanian transition could be described in terms of a impatience's political economy (Barbu, 1999: 111). What characterizes the post-communist period, both from the point of view of society, but especially from the point of view of politics, is a process of initial institution of democracy and consolidation of very low speed in relation to the expectations of the population (Sandu, 1999: 37-70). The policy of leveling the society from the economic, social and cultural point of view that the communist regime practiced in Romania will finally dictate the different speeds of the changes from the post-communist period.

The transition stage of the Romanian post-communism will represent the stage of major changes, having at macro-social level as a result a new societal order. But this new societal order is the result of an import modernity that responds to the immediate needs of some individuals, concerned only with their social and economic condition and we find that the socio-institutional structures in traditional Romanian society are still present, unaltered at this stage. At the end of the road, in the post-transition, we find that we are not in the dream-type Western capitalism, and that in the absence of a political project of modernization in the Romanian space, modernity remains only a trend. Post-communism is far from a balanced situation, it is rather a stage in social development.

The processes of change in post-December Romania have been permanently redefined in the last 30 years, leading at least temporarily to another type of societal organization, oscillating between capitalism and communism, between tradition and modernity, but with postmodern influences, between social democracy, conservatism, and liberalism. Certainly, the post-communist Romanian society is strongly impacted by numerous influences, such as exogenous factors that represent certain elements of globalization processes: the common history of the region, contact with Western Europe, but also internal factors related to tradition and national specificity (Voicu 2005: 70).

Romanian Post-Communism. Redefining Modernity and the Shortcomings of Communism

We now find that political institutions, although they have copied the model of Western democracy, their cultural inadequacy prevents them from being truly effective. Although the country's economy has been restructured, the market lacks capital and production is lower than in developed countries. Corruption is an important resource for subsistence and accumulation at the individual level. Distrust in political institutions due to disappointments associated with the costs of reform and declining living standards, will lead to a lack of interest of citizens in how to structure the political act and their reduced involvement in decision-making.

Among the causes and premises of the authentic Romanian modernity we find a civil society that lacks the force of action. The power vacuum after 1990 will confuse civil society and fuel Romanians' nostalgia for communism. Series such as “Memorialul durerii” or literature on the “Fenomenul Pitești” will cast anathema on the communist period. But, the thirty years of post-communism, in which we still do not see, do not even glimpse the light at the end of the tunnel have induced in a large part of Romanian society a real state of hypnotic regression that has given rise to many stories about how good it was during the communist era. For several years, we have been witnessing a real explosion of collective memory with nostalgic accents about communism. Bogdan Voicu remarks that people would individually reproduce the models learned in communism for many years, and society would feel this in their way of is structured (Voicu 2005: 16). History does not mean the whole past, but neither does everything that remains of the past. Or, if we want, in addition to written history, there is a living history that is perpetuated or renewed over time and in which many old currents can be found that only seemingly disappeared.

The commercials for sweets from the communist period, the wave of the literature produced by the young authors or directors who exploit from a literary point of view childhood and adolescence spent under a totalitarian regime, are just as many ways to remember communism, sometimes in totally unexpected forms. The memory of communism is a meeting place between generations, between the young people who never knew Ceausescu and the old people who openly regret some gone times. We notice a certain obsession with the idea of dictatorship in the conversations between people, of the order and discipline of the past, now lost. We don't know what to do with the idea of responsibility. We are not used to taking care ourselves. Someone else must answer for our individual destiny. We miss the state's perpetual support, and we miss the food and drink we despised in the communist era. Although, in essence, communism as well as capitalism knows the same mechanisms of relationship with labor, products, consumption. The communist society gave birth to the phenomenon of fetishization of objects which we didn't find in the market, but also due to price stability. The consequence is that for a much longer period you have the same objects and phenomena that do not change, and this produces a certain type of memory.

Resolving the controversies and divergences between nostalgic and pro-Europeans related to the path that post-communist Romania must follow, requires the presence of a real public space for the manifestation of civil society. But the birth of public space in post-communist Romania was grafted by media distortions and state violence, from which we can conclude that the political power that controls the media at some point, but also manages the state's coercive capacity is interested in altering this real public space.

Conceptually like the physical space occupied by objects, the public space can in turn be occupied by one ideology or another, the ideological conflict between various

opposing camps distorting the lines of force of public space, such as front lines on a battlefield. The existence of public space is conditioned by human interaction, it being in fact the result of interactions between individuals and populated human groups. The more intense the human interaction in the public space, the more alive the public space is. When interaction is lacking, public space is lacking. The public space, or public sphere, is an environment, which is based on political reason, a space in which individuals can express themselves freely, without constraints of time, resources, themes and where arguments should take precedence over power and the state. After Paul Johnson this space is created even by the interactions between individuals willing to accept that the ideas argued have greater power than the authority of tradition (Johnson 2001: 217).

The creation and recreation of public space are essential actions for strengthening democracy, as only public space is the environment where political actors can justify actions and can take responsibilities, a place of launching and debate for political initiative. After Erik Eriksen it thus becomes a political resource, facilitating both the autonomous formation of public opinion and the ability of citizens to influence political decisions (Eriksen 2005: 352).

Making an analysis of the post-communist genesis of the Romanian public space, states Codruța Cuceu opinioned that the moment of transition from communism to what appears to us as democracy, defining itself as post-communism should have created conditions at least for founding a space public as a place of constant manifestation of a subsequent public sphere, meant to reduce the range of the state and to constantly adjust the ratio between public space and private space (Cuceu 2010: 40).

Media distortion and state violence are the most used mechanisms by which the communist regime in Romania controlled society. Codruța Cuceu remarks that what was to be established as a real public space becomes, through several historical mechanisms, a simulacrum of public space (Cuceu 2010: 40).

The public television is a constant factor in manipulating public opinion. The most obvious episode of manipulation is the media distortion of the Romanian Revolution, through which communism will invent civil society and ensure its own survival. A propaganda tool of the communist regime, the state television of December 1989 will create a false, artificial public space, in which the debate of events is simulated and not authentic and which will succeed in legitimizing the so-called “new political class”, which will impose itself without popular support. Media systems are under political pressure, which leads to politicization. After the fall of communism, we find that most of the Romanian media is politicized.

At the 30 years after announcing the victory of the revolution on public television, things take a completely different turn, and military prosecutors advance the idea that during the events of December 89 television broadcasts created a diversion of information and the appearance of a civil war. Leveled the way to power of security generals, and the army, casters, and security guards.

A second historical mechanism that will lead to another simulacrum of the Romanian public space is the state violence, a mechanism that can be exemplified by the “Mineriada” of June 13-15, 1990. University Square is declared a “free zone of communism” becoming the symbol the fight against neo-communism, coagulating civil society and non-governmental organizations to stop the occupation of public office by members of the former communist nomenclature and by members of the Security. However, this public space will be annihilated by the bloody violence of the “miners” to

Romanian Post-Communism. Redefining Modernity and the Shortcomings of Communism

restore public order. On the streets, students and intellectuals were brutally beaten by "miners", brought by train to Bucharest by order of Ion Iliescu. Opposition political leaders were hunted down by beaten individuals, and party headquarters and their homes were devastated. The new neo-communist power in Bucharest wanted absolute control, in the name of a legitimacy gained through the elections of May 20, 1990. The leaders gathered around Ion Iliescu refused to leave the communist mentality and, without restraint, practiced state violence.

The public space as a place of manifestation of the civil society in the first years after the fall of communism suffers from a phase shift between concept and reality, because the Romanian democracy is treated by the political elites as an extrinsic issue of the civil society. Thus, the concept of democracy is monopolized in the political space, being used by political leaders for propaganda purposes, and the power of civil society is too small to be able to oppose and give consistency to a real public space of manifestation.

The anti-corruption protests in Romania from 2017–2019 will consecrate Victoriei Square as a public space for the manifestation of civil society. The amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, the amendments to the Fiscal Code and the political corruption will represent as many causes that will displease the Romanian civil society. The anti-corruption protests in Victoriei Square on August 10, 2018 will be marked by violence between protesters and law enforcement. Members of the ruling parties had a hostile attitude towards the protesters and stated that the rally was a political one, in the context in which the representatives of the main opposition parties announced their presence at the protest.

Again, almost 30 years after the fall of communism, state violence creates a mockery of public space from a real public space. Therefore, the Romanian society as a whole, although it is defined as democratic, is still today lacking socio-political consciousness, a sign of apathy or rejection of political life.

Freed from the ideological constraints specific to the previous totalitarian system, the Romanian public space has not yet resumed its role as a market, as a meeting place for equal but different people. This image favors the perspective of the public space as being given, like the physical space, therefore available for its occupation depending on the result of the ideological confrontations. The existence of standards of objectivity, the existence of a prior code of intellectual exchange, the appropriate formulation of discourses for the exchange of ideas as a condition of meeting the criteria of competitive interaction, are all subsumed by the logic of public space. Without an objective public space of intellectual exchange, that is, a public space capable of harboring the truth and freedom of the person, there is no objective reality.

Certainly, no one expected democracy to function flawlessly in a country whose democratic traditions are not deeply rooted, but rather a form of import from the West. In fact, we find that post-communist Romania does not function as a democracy, but as an oligarchy with a democratic face. The power of the people, the foundation of democracy, is strongly limited and skillfully hijacked by the political elite, in fact, deeply divided ideologically, which contributes significantly to the instability of the political system.

Between the War for Independence and the First World War, the Romanian elite will consolidate, mainly politically. Between the First World War and the Second World War, the new Romanian elite will be a symbiotic construct, both with aristocratic reflections and with modern nuances. This is the model that will dominate the interwar

period. As such, the great cultural personalities will be, during this period, equally great political personalities, deliberately assuming this dimension.

If we look back, the establishment of the Romanian communist regime in led to the annihilation of the entire Romanian elite and its replacement with an ideological elite, foreign to national traditions and culture. Arriving at the same time, after the collapse of the communist regime, the political elite remained equally conflicted, failing to establish a minimum consensus on the rules of the political game and, again, the development model considered most appropriate for the country. This time, the most important dividing line is the position of power, according to which the political elite has divided into two opposing camps: those who govern and those in opposition. The post-communist Romanian political elite is an elite of the position or position occupied, divided by disagreement regarding the rules of the game and the values of the institutions.

Currently, the Romanian elites do not have the capacity to produce and support a competitive social development. This is the reason why Romania imposes changes that do not have the support of the majority of society and which look like experiments whose effects are impossible to anticipate. The organization of the Romanian communist society on the principles of the free market and the rule of law was not able to produce a modern social organization, with a consistent civil society, a true public space dominated by a direct and principled dialogue between social actors. At present, Romania is dependent on a social system that is not communism but either capitalism.

As Schifineț observed the lack of communication and real solidarity between all segments of society, between elites and the population are a proof of the modern trend. The axiological system is still dominated by the transition from traditional to modern values. Although an institutional political and legal framework has been established, based mainly on European legislation and norms, I must say that the foundations of capitalist and democratic development are still precarious in today's Romanian society. The political class and the intellectual elites have a discourse oriented towards modernity, but they fail to create a consistent project of development and modernization (Schifirneț 2016: 113-126).

So, more than thirty years after the fall of the communist regime, as an arc over time, the Romanian society is divided, between the nostalgic of the communist regime and the Western European model of development. Post-communist Romania is in a permanent societal redefinition that oscillates between capitalism and communism, between modernity and tradition. An active civil society in a real public space could be the solution for resolving the existing divergences in the actual Romanian society. However, a real public space, undistorted by partisan interests, proves to be an unattainable target for post-communist Romania. Undoubtedly, the remnants and nostalgia of the former communist regime have remained in the collective minds of a mature population today. The attachment of Romanians to the Western European model seems increasingly weak due to the economic, social and cultural involution of Romania in recent decades.

References:

- Barbu, D. (1999). *Republica absentă*. Editura Nemira. București.
- Cuceu, C. (2010). Despre geneza post comunistă a spațiului public românesc. *Analele Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu” din Cluj-Napoca*, Series Humanistica, tom. VIII, 39-52.

Romanian Post-Communism. Redefining Modernity and the Shortcomings of Communism

- Eriksen, E. (2005). An Emerging European Public Sphere, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 8, nr. 3, 341-363.
- Franzén, M. (***). Deconstructing Aldous Huxley's Brave New World's Ambiguous Portrayal of the future. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1283674/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Habermas, J. (2005). *Sfera publică și transformarea ei structurală*. Comunicare.ro. București.
- Hunt, L. (2008). Modernity and History. *Measuring Time, Making History*. NED-New edition, 1, Vol. 1, 47–92. Central European University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt1282fh.5>
- Johnson, P. (2001). Habermas's Search for the Public Sphere, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 4, nr. 2, 215-236.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1952). Race and History. *The Race Question in Modern Science. Race and History*. Unesco Paris.
- Sandu, D. (1999). *Spațiul social al tranziției*, Iași: Editura Polirom.
- Schifirneț, C. (2009). Modernitatea tendențială. *Sociologie Românească*, vol VII, nr. 4, 80-97.
- Schifirneț, C., (2016). *Modernitatea tendențială. Reflecții despre diversitatea evoluției societăților modern*. Editura Tritonic. București.
- Voicu, B., (2005). *Penuria Pseudo-Modernă a Postcomunismului Românesc. Schimbarea social și acțiunile indivizilor*, Volumul I. Editura Expert Projects.

Article Info

Received: November 03 2021

Accepted: November 13 2021
