

## BOOK REVIEW

**Iulia Anamaria Ghidiu\***

**Vasile Pușcaș**, *România și calea de viață europeană*

[*Romania and the European way of life*], Cluj-Napoca, Școala Ardeleană  
Publishing House, 2017, 252 pages

The volume “Romania and the European way of life” (2017), by professor Vasile Pușcaș, presents-without pretending to be exhaustive on the topic-a comprehensive analysis of the local, national, regional and global context of Romania's accession to the European Union, an analysis of the-both technical and political- process of accession negotiations, as well as of the post-accession European evolution of the country, at exactly one decade of membership.

The book appeared at Școala Ardeleană publishing house (Cluj-Napoca) and it encompasses the vast experience of Romania's chief negotiator with the European Union, unveiling in its two sections (*Articles* and *Interviews*) the advantages, the benefits for us, the Romanians following the accession (although mainly by the contagion effect of the single market), our attitude as country when relating to the supranational level of decision making, the less inspired interpretation of the true meaning of EU membership (a partnership and not only a mere alliance or practice of foreign policy), and of the role that we must assume, as well as

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recommendations on the lessons Romania should internalize, in order to shape a distinct type of involvement, a distinct, proactive cooperation, at the European Union level and not exclusively.

Moreover, in a deeply interconnected world, our country vision must be a global, integrationist one, we have to detect and to access in a wise manner the opportunities standing out on the horizon. The transatlantic partnership represents another worthy reference point where Romania has to revise its real value potential.

Although with prospective lucidity, often critical-not unreasonably!-about the chances that were given to us and that we didn't rend profitable, Vasile Pușcaș maintains his optimism and confidence in the inception of a fresh, authentic and vigorous leadership (at both the national and the European levels), who could give an impetus to the European identity reconstruction, managing the crisis the Union is undergoing at the moment and who could insert Romania on the right path to sustainable development and prosperity for all citizens.

The series of articles published and gathered in the present volume preserves the same line, the same pulse, the same tonic and, now and then, metaphoric language. The author reinforces perspectives resorting to sincere confessions and beliefs, as one who has been there in flesh and blood and who knows when the time is ripe. The alarm signal-in academic style-, the stimulus to general mobilization are not absent equally, alternating the first person singular with the plural demonstrates the diplomat's confidence in the power of collective action for the common good of the country: "a dignified and prosperous insertion of the country on the European way of life. I believe this is our duty, of all the young men and women of Romania, for the next decade and for the others to come!"<sup>1</sup>

Elaborating a post-accession strategy was not one of our virtues, it had no significant impact and was showing syncopes from the part of the government that ended up suspending the whole process. Not until recently, the subject of a country project has stagnated and because of that, Romania didn't make a favourable impression at the supranational level.

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<sup>1</sup> Vasile Pușcaș, *România și calea de viață europeană*, Cluj Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2017, p. 64.

The best practice model of the "business plan", specific to corporate governance, could and it should represent a case in point, a source of inspiration for the decisions being taken in the internal political leadership sphere, at the level of what generically call "country project" or "national project".

The motivation lies, indisputably, in the optimization of the process of allocating different resources, of assessing and harnessing the identified opportunities-through realist projections- but also in offering the ideal framework for multilevel cooperation among numerous state and non-state actors. In addition, the country project involves the political forces into a beneficial competition, designed to generate the social progress of the citizens and it is a strong symbol of the modernity, maturity and identity with which we affirm ourselves externally, at European and international levels. On this matter, Romania must begin performing, in the context of a complex global system, characterized by profound interdependencies, thus becoming a proactive force, not only reactive, reactionary to a series of exogenous stimuli, a partner and not only an ally.

There were, of course, both supporters and critics on the development of a country project. Many opinion leaders approved its obvious necessity, but we could also see others' skeptical attitude towards such an ambitious project.

It is true that, in 1989, Romanians' disconnection with the old regime and Occidental transition didn't proposed an own model of progress to be completed, following the mimesis approach and considering many things for granted once the accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures. Romania's full integration is still desirable, in a not too distant future, as the chief negotiator and we, the young generation, hope.

Romania's journey within the European Union has been marked by a context of successive crises for Europe (a constitutional one-see the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by France and the Netherlands and the transposal of many of its provisions into the Lisbon Treaty-, an economic and financial one, a leadership crisis and even an existential one). Brexit has pointed out the tensions at their peak within the European globe, a state of surprise and of shock.

The European crisis was maintained by the wrong approach of member states' leaders (Romania included) towards local action and effect, compared with an ample, integrationist view. Even though the benefits of EU membership are significant, our involvement continues to be lacunary. Especially given the systemic crisis we are now undergoing, Romania's initiative in consolidating partnership relations and in balancing global-integrationism with national sovereign order becomes indispensable in overcoming the stalemate and rebuilding the European architecture from the bottom, avoing the superficiality in our relation with Brussels.

Assessing the first decade of European membership has preoccupied not only the Romanian society at large (not so much the leadership) but also the elites in other member states, if we consider the internal problems our country still faces and the larger context of the enlargement process, for which some voices expressed their skepticism.

Undoubtedly, the economic benefits of our membership to the European construct (resulted in their majority from the inevitable contacts with the Single Market, manifested in its four liberties) can be considered the most eloquent example (EU funded programs, attracting FDIs, GDP growth, exports growth). Still, one could have observed the inconsistency in continuing to apply the European policies after accession, in comparison with the Polish model of development, which the author mentions frequently.

With a dose of realism, Vasile Pușcaș expresses his regrets for Romania's current state of progress, from the perspective of a triad that he proposes as an ideal formula to mark the EU integration, *change-developent-modernization*: "I do not believe the fact that Romania is still the country with the major discrepancies within the European Union is anyhow satisfactory, if we take into account that, from 1997 we apply regional development policies but these discrepancies continue to grow."<sup>2</sup> The vicious pro-ciclicity (affecting the status of a functional market economy), serving the interests of small groups, the lack of vision, have all drifted us away from the European core and from the international network.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

The Romanian crisis is not exclusively the effect of the atmosphere within the European Union that has marked the moment of our accession, it has also been enforced by internal inconsistencies (economic crisis, democratic deficit). Fellow countrymen who have chosen to make a living abroad (since we could not "bring Europe at home") simply didn't find enough incentives to return.

Another deadlock Vasile Pușcaș is underlining refers to the erroneous interpretation of the native leadership, to the division EU=economic prosperity versus NATO=national security guarantees, detrimental to a vision of the complementarity of these two entities Romania is part of, the active involvement as a member country in one structure automatically generating effects on the other type of partnership.

If once in the possession of "the European passport", political leaders refrained from exhibiting the same interest in "the transition to the unknown", the author attributes a great contribution-and absolutely with good reason-to the entrepreneurs community in Romania for what means detecting the competitive advantages of the Single Market and making skillful use of them by exploiting resources, the native development potential of the country.

Following a transparent analysis of the status quo, the university professor stimulates Romania to take advantage of its first European decade anniversary and to see it as a reflection moment on several pillars, regarding what was offered to/requested from us as in the position of member state, regarding what we have harnessed and what not-extremely important!-, as well as what we could (and should!) change in the future. A future of the identity (re)construction that requires to be shaped from the inside, with the cooperation of endogenous forces and where Romania will have the chance of a more able involvement. Also must we consider the not too distant assuming of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, beginning with July 2019.

In professor Pușcaș' s words, overcoming the deadlock where the Union is now trapped does not mean evoking the days of glory in the history of European construction or simply hoping for a better day. Quite the opposite, pragmatic action is required, rethinking the decision-making processes at the level of European institutions, the EU imposing itself as first-hand actor on the international scene.

Out of a series of constructive dialogues he had had with master students, professor Vasile Pușcaș wanted to display their position towards Romania in the European Union, emphasizing the majoritarian optimism for personal involvement on the way to development, for the internal metamorphosis of the country and of the European construction, as well as the young generation's lucidity about the current crisis the Union is undergoing.

The europenization process is understood by the students in terms of sustainable development projects, of connecting the local aspirations to the regional/European ones, of recovering the issue of brain drain, of investing in the human capital, in innovative industries, in terms of perception change in the mentality of the common citizen and of the elites, in the terms of a strategy of visionary and mobilizing political leadership.

Vasile Pușcaș mentions some other challenges Romania faces at this time. More precisely, he talks about redressing the large dependence on the EU Internal Market with regard to the export flow, about the valorisation of the real commercial potential in Romanian-American bilateral relations and about revising the mix of national economic policies in accordance with the new trends at regional, transatlantic and even global levels.

With the occasion of various interviews he gave, professor and diplomat Vasile Pușcaș discussed the malformations of the faulty mechanism of Romania's European integration. Beyond the visible progresses in the economic sector (as part of the contact with the Single Market rules of the game), Romania has been a counterexample, an underperformer on matters of social cohesion and convergence. The mercantilist, clientele-like approach, favouring small groups, did not shed a pleasant light on us in Brussels.

The state of preparations regarding the eurozone accession is, in the author's perspective, conditional upon the evolution of the efforts towards implementing real convergence policies. Here, Romania still needs to work.

Out of his experience in negotiating Romania's accession Treaty with the EU, the diplomat remembers the added value of the negotiation team who joined him in Brussels, the most sensitive chapters but also the disappointment from some leaders who did not assume their commitments made in 2007 and who, basically, missed out on many opportunities, a fact that resulted in a series of costs for the Romanian society.

At some point, Vasile Pușcaș emphasizes that one of the most significant challenges for our country at the very beginning of the accession negotiations was the process of trust building among the actors at the table. We were accepted to the league when not even our compatriots believed there will be such a possibility, although they were heavily supporting this result.

The erroneous perception of "Santa Claus' abundance bag" towards the EU has costed us a lot. Romania should have actively involved and refused displaying the "snow flower behaviour". At the same time, it would be more beneficial-as the author suggests-to stop blaming the supranational authorities or "the corporate invasion" for our own failures and to begin looking for the intrinsic causes of the problem (it is also true that populist tendencies have been observed in many member countries).

Although he admits the absence of an European leadership capable to speculate about the long term opportunities of sustainable development of the European project (following the reconstruction model of the European Community soon after the eurosclerosis period between 1975-1985), Vasile Pușcaș maintains his optimistic message that they will appear out of somewhere.

The context in which our country entered the accession negotiations was not one of the happiest ones and we discuss here both the international changes (caused by the tragic 9/11 events, the Balkan crisis) and the country's image (see the repeated refusal Romania received with regard to its accession to the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization or the conflictual characteristics of the internal political environment).

During the interview with the Austrian professor Michael Gehler, Vasile Pușcaș talks about "the common values" (humanity and democracy) that attracted the intellectual elites towards accessing the European project, identifying a sense of attachment to the interwar system order. Even so, "the restauration" had been replaced by internal struggles for power among the postcommunist nomenclature, a wasted time, detrimental to consolidating relations with the Central and Eastern Europe.

Romania's (and Bulgaria's) accession was perceived by the European Union from a more strategic perspective, in order no to keep these states in a buffer zone, given the context of the Balkan conflict.

The chief negotiator presents a radiography of the European politics at the moment of the accession negotiations, he also describes both the technical and the political dimensions of the process, the large and lasting consultations, the internal political, economic and social negotiations, that involved a great number of stakeholders from all the society levels (governments, opposition representatives, trade unions, NGO's, European transnational parties, the academic environment, the market partners). The present work unveils, from backstage, the negotiator and his team's amount of work, his mobility in space and time, his agility, coordinating a complex network, shifting foreign investors' perspective once the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* during the preparation stage, the process of bilateral negotiations, the shaping of a country image in the European capitals, harnessing other member states know-how, as well as a series of obstacles he has faced (the opposition of some states on the last minute towards concluding the negotiations, proposals of freezing the discussions during the process or proposals to radically change the overall negotiation strategy).

The importance of the Copenhagen (1993) and the Madrid (1995) criteria is understood in the vision, the orientation of the Romanian political leadership, through their pattern of development, of transforming the mere accession, although many leaders have related themselves to these as to a number of directives and recommendations coming from outside and not as to a reality that had to be internalized in the domestic environment. There's nothing untrue about the fact that the negotiator's identities have multiplied once the ample process of country representation at the supranational level and of negotiating its new status in Europe, but this is a completely different discussion.

The personality of the European commissioner managing the enlargement portfolio at that time, Mr. Günter Verheugen, is reflected in the present volume, "Romania and the European way of life", Vasile Pușcaș noting his pragmatic attitude („facts, not words!"), the way in which the commissioner, even if he had started skeptically, when identifying a small piece of progress within the country, he encouraged us, he supported the idea that change is actually possible and he stimulated us to start working.

Although it was an asymmetric negotiation process, as the Transylvanian diplomat remembers, Verheugen knew how to promote the formula of a win-win result, being "a fair negotiator, dedicated to the European cause".<sup>3</sup>

Of course, atlanticism has also impacted on the process of accession negotiations (both positively and negatively-see the contradictions between the allies regarding NATO's intervention in Iraq). Undisputably, for the Romanian cause there was a strong connection between the EU and NATO, in the sense that NATO acceptance has opened up the road for the accession to the Community space, considering the country's state of development.

On the anniversary of the first European decade, "Romania and the European way of life" offers the public a commemoration of the experiences that determined the path to progress, to the modernization of the country to be opened, a commemoration of the difficulties and of the persistence of those who believed in this noble cause, of the benefits as member and as partner (as actively engaged as possible!) but also to draw attention to the side slip manifested in the post-accession period (and of the peril that may still perpetuate if we do not mobilize a genuine change!).

Professor Vasile Pușcaș's confessions and incentives enjoy transparency and they totally deserve to make their echo heard within influential decision-making circles, because they happen in the framework of the negotiation mandate in itself, in other words, out of the experience of the one to whom the Romanians entrusted their shift of historical destiny, the attraction to the Western dream, the transition to a distinct set of values.

Therefore, the volume proposes a complex approach, placing the discussions into the context of global interdependencies and thus, it accounts for a sincere and open call to massive involvement at all the society levels, towards all the actors and potential dialogue partners, in troubling times for our continent.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 227