

An Unresolved Polemic of Romanian Modernity in the Cultural Press of 1995–1996

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Preliminaries

DURING THE communist regime, debates on modern times (modernity, modernism) experienced significant deviations or reshaping, the main derailing factor for reasoning and thought being ideology. Both in the Stalinist (1948–1964) and in the Ceaușescu period (with the pseudo-nationalist infusion), the old tradition/modernity polemic, which had permeated the entire Romanian culture since 1848, experienced bizarre adaptations, to say the least. It was either censored, thus almost absent in the Stalinist period, with so-called “internationalist” aspirations, or hyperinflated in the “synchronism vs. protochronism” surrogate variant in the Ceaușescu years. Given this imposed suppression, it goes without saying that after 1989 we witnessed a true return of the repressed; the polemic returns in deviant forms, exhibiting its entire doctrinal excess, sometimes in a distorted fashion. This is primarily a post-communist psychosis which, until the year 2000 (even 2010), found its place in many Romanian journalistic debates.¹ We are witnessing a defining polemic for the age of modernity in a time when, at least theoretically speaking, this ideological paradigm had become obsolete (starting with the pivotal year 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the postmodern talks about revolution as utopia). Hence the impression of a different ideological program between the West and the East, reiterating the same asynchronous overlapping of cultural stages (and, implicitly, the same time gap in perception) specific, to a certain extent, to Romanian culture—it may be, however, a case of temporal Bovarism in terms of perception, vitalized by the driving force that E. Lovinescu considered the cornerstone of our modernity, namely synchronism (synchronous reverie).

Irrespective of how things stand, the resurgence of the tradition/modernity polemic in post-communism is significant in many ways. The first is that of a modernity that refuses to perish because it has not completely run its course. The second is that of the spe-

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cial (contextual) shifts that it supports and which separate it from the Forty-Eighter-Junimea like or inter-war forms of the debate. Finally, the third concerns the specific way our culture responds to the challenges of the post-communist period, which also manifested themselves in other Eastern or Southeast European cultures, the issue having an additional resonance against the backdrop of the unexpected resurgence of nationalism, at the end of the 20th century, in the context of the Yugoslav conflict.

Thus begins one of the most substantial polemics in the Romanian literary press of the '90s, in June 1995, and it extends until the middle of the following year. This is a dispute regarding nationalism and Europeanism, concepts launched against the backdrop of a possible and desirable future integration in the European Union. According to the Swiss historian Urs Altermatt, the Euroscepticism which also characterized Western European states in relation to this political and diplomatic construct would have a special resonance in the case of ex-communist countries. If during totalitarian regimes the European idea worked here as “a stimulus against communism,”² the situation changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when these countries plunged into the post-traumatic process of recovering a historical and cultural memory damaged by forced Sovietisation. Hence the risk of a nationalist populism and the lack of critical clarity in the integrationist process. If we take into account the fact that the main representatives of the two opposing sides will also have irreconcilable stances in the debates brought about by the Yugoslav War, we can assume that the polemic extends in other forms until the 2000s. The matter should be tackled at length by corroborating the related topics of the Romanian press during 1990–2000, but also with those in the European debates around that time. In the present article, we suggest an in-depth analysis of the main interventions in the polemic in the mid '90s, a pivotal point in the Romanian modernity debate in post-communism.

THE STARTING point of the polemic is the article by Gabriel Andreescu, “Should We Look at the Republic of Moldova or Hungary?”³ in which the question in the title is resolved in favor of the second country. Andreescu’s intervention somewhat adds to the findings of the study entitled “Raporturile României cu Republica Moldova” (Romania’s relations with the Republic of Moldova) (1994), done in collaboration with Valentin Stan and Renate Weber. The author gets to the bottom of the geo-political dilemma by invoking an older scruple of modernists in general and choosing the last term of East/West and past/future equations. Here are Andreescu’s arguments:

The relationship with Hungary will define our access to the civilized world. . . . The transparency of the border with Hungary and the assurance, through intensive economic liberalization, of Transylvania’s involvement in regional dynamism are the elements of a strategy with the power to connect Romania to the Europe of tomorrow. . . . This implies an acceptance of the regional situation created by the formation of the state of Moldova and a focus on our European integration goals, which in turn means Romania has to strengthen its relations with Hungary. Thus, coming to terms with history also means that the Republic of Moldova is looking at our past. Regarding Romania’s international relations, Hungary is looking towards the future. I can almost hear the “patriots” who will rhetorically state that the above thesis dishonors the memory of the Romanian people.

The intervention triggers strong and consistent reactions from Alexandru Paleologu and Octavian Paler, followed by Andreescu's retorts and interventions by other intellectuals, the somewhat unexpected result of this vast and very interesting exchange of ideas being, as I said, the continuation of the famous modernity/tradition polemic (in the European integration aspirations/scruples key regarding the preservation of the national specificity) until 1990–2000. The first to intervene in the polemic is Alexandru Paleologu, who publishes a text titled "Pacta sunt servanda."⁴ Without questioning the obligation of sound diplomatic relations with Hungary (these being even "a very strong buffer against the Pan-Slavism that is now setting its sights on the Adriatic"), Paleologu considers Andreescu's choice as devoid of honor: "The idea that, if we do not let go of Bessarabia, we risk losing Transylvania, is an inadmissible alternative. We cannot choose between two dishonorable abdications. . . . Without honor there can be no civilization, no civic life, no true society, but only, as I said, an aggregate of hominines. . . . 'to enter Europe' (that is, to say it clearly, to resume our natural place) cannot be conceived in any way through dishonor."

Octavian Paler, the other interlocutor, initially publishes a text entitled "The Thorny Issue of Identity."⁵ According to the essayist, this "issue" cannot be solved by simply choosing between a country "without that part of Transylvania excised in Vienna" and one "without what Stalin took from us." To a greater extent than Paleologu, Paler is interested in the whole issue raised by such "options." First of all, it is a question of nationalism, then contextually dealing with this emblematic polemic for Romanian spirituality. With regard to nationalism, Paler distinguishes between "normal nationalism"—which would include "the nationalist movements in Bessarabia or the Baltic countries and, in general, the aspiration of East Europeans (as long as it is not peddled by demagogues and turned into chauvinism) to break away from Soviet internationalism"—and "an aggressive, restrictive, delinquent brand of nationalism" (which can be found in the speeches of some individuals such as "Funar, Vadim and other opportunists who discuss the national idea", according to the essayist). As for the issue of Europeanism vs. national specificity, Paler suggests another equivalence of the two terms, beyond the prejudices or inferiority complexes of "teachers of 'European values' who would look towards the West with genuine servitude, convinced that even the nonsense there is a form of civilization, importable of course, or even to be obligatorily imported to be *à la page*." A "strange presbytem" would make them doubt what is national:

it is not just that Funar and Vadim are incapable of hiding their visceral urge to hate in public, but they also flaunt it like a monkey flashes its red ass. I find it terrible, too, that some subtle "Europeans" who turn their nose when they hear the word "national," at a time when we still need to recover our historic memory, unwittingly help "the Securitate guys" flaunt their cheap brand of nationalism. All this while Romania, being in a "transition" period from a "socialism of nobodies" to a "capitalism of scumbags," is distancing itself even further from its traditions and, in fact, from its identity, which is tragic.

In other words, in the essayist's opinion, we are witnessing a phenomenon of Europeanized frustration with disproportionate manifestations on both sides: integration is either

supported apologetically but devoid of criticism or prohibitively by peddling populist speeches.

In five issues in 22 magazine,⁶ Gabriel Andreescu responds to Paleologu and Paler in an article titled “Octavian Paler, Alexandru Paleologu and the Thorny Problem of Nationalism.” For Andreescu, the positions in this polemic are reduced to the following principles indirectly presented, as irreconcilable:

For the “normal” nationalist, the issues that matter are how we relate to the identity lost under communism, how we bring back lost customs, how we promote the old spiritual or territorial boundaries, how we preserve (or develop) the youth’s interest for classical Romanian history and culture, how we involve religious identity in social development, which was the origin of the formation of the Romanian state etc. For an anti-nationalist such as me, the following are relevant for Romanian society: defending and promoting human rights, creating (stabilizing) the institutions of the rule of law, ensuring the comfort of all nationalities as a part of social harmony, promoting a policy that reduces suffering, injustice, which promises prosperity or at least a decent standard of living, ensuring living conditions for future generations (i.e. sustainable development). Finally, what kind of treaties the regional stability ensures, what international behavior will allow the citizens of this country to travel with dignity through the world? These are different concerns, different questions, divergent strategies; probably specific conclusions, and some opposed.

Given the distinctions with which the essayist operates, it is worth noticing that, while the objectives that connect to “tradition” are somewhat predictable, those specific to “modernism” have strong incidental meaning (if we think of the etymology of the concept itself). Going back to Andreescu’s intervention, Paleologu is accused of lacking scientific documentation: “A responsible intellectual had the duty to see the statistics, to follow the latest legislative developments, to keep up with the documents of the European institutions he referred to and with the main analysts (magazines, books).” As for Octavian Paler, he would fall into the powerful category of seductive nationalists⁷ (equated to that of “anti-Westerners”), his anti-modern susceptibility and traditionalist reverie (in the solid sense of the term) being somewhat mocked by minimizing references; he, like Paleologu, is also given similar advice:

*I have often tried to find out what Mister Octavian Paler takes into consideration when he appeals to “traditions,” to the “identity” of Romania, which he places in **opposition** with the European spirit from which they have to be protected. Apart from some childhood memories or purely cultural references, “Eternal Romania,” in which he lives with nostalgia, seemed to me to exist in hopeless confusion. Is there some truth to the educational principle we used to school our children with—“spare the rod and spoil the child”—which is condemned in Western countries? Or the custom recounted by parents—the bride’s relatives who used to take the blood-smeared bedsheet to the streets when the wedding night ended? . . . It would be worthwhile if Mr. Octavian Paler and other intellectuals interested in the problem of Europeanism would flip through the jurisprudence of the European Court (which judges complaints against states that violate the ECHR).*

Octavian Paler does not hesitate to retort—in 6 issues in the 22 magazine,⁸ he published a serial called “Between Barbaric Nationalism and Europeans from ‘Nowhere’” (that is, between C. V. Tudor and Gabriel Andreescu). Paler’s intervention may well be in the “national specificity” file as one of the most substantial texts in the entire history of this ample debate. To begin with, the anti-modern⁹ Paler once again highlights his position, distancing it from the simple traditionalist reverie (idealizing in a simplistic way and without adherence to modern sensitivity):

Mr. Andreescu also says with pedantic serenity that I am a “traditionalist intellectual.” You are wrong, Mr. Andreescu. Traditionalists loathe modernity, which is not my case. Among other things, though I speak so much about my native village . . . , I find Sămănătorism [an ideological-artistic movement at the beginning of the twentieth century that posits the superiority of rural over urban life] quite unpalatable and deem it a common man’s work that started to shout his nostalgia and sighs on rooftops . . . But when have I ever said that this world is perfect? I do not miss the mud or the gas lamps. I do not dream of living in the Village Museum, to defend everything that is archaic, not to asphalt our streets so that their dust mixes with the dust of the stars. If you had pondered more, you would have understood that I do not pay homage to an ideal village, suggested as a model, I commemorate the village of my childhood, where I lived in poverty the glory of existing like the gods, if that means anything to you. I pay homage to a moral order that unfortunately ceased to exist. It probably makes you smile when you read Blaga’s verse in which he says that eternity started in the village. I do not . . . Do you know how I feel like when I go to Lisa and see that there are only two roads now, one leading to the cemetery and the other to the station?

The additional note that specifies Paler’s intervention in the context of this old polemic is the awareness of the quasi-disappearance (or inherent precariousness) of the referent that grounded the position of the old partisans of “tradition.” At least until 1948 (1944), they produced their discourse at a time when the Romanian village world really existed, an entity that was subjected, in the years of communist dictatorship, to a dramatic attempt at total destruction (a similar situation existed in the other states of the East). Hence the particular intervention that places it as a possible end point of the old polemic. Judging from the comparison he proposes (amnesia), Paler’s modernization process, as Andreescu understands it, seems to him a highly alienating one, involving the torture through which Aitmatov’s character had his memory wiped off and became enslaved: “Mr. Andreescu, the idea is not to break from our roots. Let us modernize without becoming *amnesiacs*. For me ‘nowhere’ sounds just as threatening as ‘never.’ And I fear that there is no ‘tomorrow’ without ‘yesterday.’” In other words, the European consciousness encompasses the national one, both coexisting in a sine qua non condition. Thus, the former risks being perceived as and the second one demagogical and vulgar. Yet the phenomenon is more complex given the delay caused by the weakening of historical and cultural memory after 1944—in these circumstances, resuming the terms of the debate should be doubled by a natural post-traumatic recovery process. In Paler’s opinion, if it is a resuming of the old polemic, it is now done in other terms, the “Europeans of nowhere” with whom he is contemporary lacking the patriotism of the Frenchified Romanian young

men, inevitably including the national question. “Amnesia” would correspond to (voluntary) “Turkishization”:

The new Frenchified Romanian youths do not have the merits of those from the nineteenth century, who brought revolutionary ideas from France in the Romanian Principalities. The ones from the last century did not repudiate the national component, they wanted to raise it to the level of others. The new ones do it wrongly. They think they are moving towards revolutionary ideas if they reject the “national” burden. They are not the modern version of the “Frenchified” but that of the “Turkishized,” with the difference that their “Turkishization” does not mean giving up a religion, but giving up the “somewhere” on which a genuine European is based. They are a new brand of “Turks” who do not wear a beanie, but carry a suitcase packed only with clothes, not memories.

According to the essayist, it is really dangerous that this type of excessive pro-integration speech immediately creates a reverse—“vulgar” nationalism: “This is why I regret that I let the national idea be confiscated (and speculated!) by individuals such as Vadim and Funar. This is why I’m sad that ‘Europeanism’ from nowhere helps and favors vulgar nationalism. If vulgar nationalism is (and it really is) a mockery of the national, ‘Europeans’ from nowhere do not understand that ‘the rediscovery of Europe’ must take place simultaneously with ‘the rediscovery of Romania’—that a nation can disappear from history not only by losing its territory but also by losing its soul.”

Alexandru Paleologu also responds to Andreescu in the 22 magazine, 6, 52 (28 December–3 January 1995) and 7, 1 (4–9 January 1996). In his opinion, European identity is not calculated in “theorems” or “algorithms,” and nationalism would temporarily have a therapeutic effect on a country emerging from the communist regime:

*I did not speak of good nationalism, but of a necessary one. I do not accept any nationalist “doctrine,” though from N. Roșu’s stupid one to the seductive one of Jacques Bainville there is a quite varied doctrinal span. I do not accept a nationalist “doctrine” because I do not accept nationalism as a perpetual attitude. In Eastern European countries, where society has systematically been subjected to a removal of national consciousness, by faking not only history but **all** values, both national and universal (i.e. European), the fundamental problem is that of rehabilitation. Shock therapy or exposure therapy? I think that shock therapy is more efficient in the economic field, as it turned out in the Czech Republic’s case. As for mentality, where the communist aftermath turned out to be more serious than we thought in 1990, the therapy can be only through exposure. This therapy has a temporary, cold, pragmatic, relativist, and nonchalant nationalism.*

As a matter of fact, Paleologu had previously advocated for “a nationalism with a European touch,”¹⁰ whose exponents were, in his opinion, personalities such as Kogălniceanu, Eminescu, Titulescu, the Brătianus, and King Michael I. Perhaps more interesting are the reasons for which the essayist still considers this type of nationalism “legitimate in the East.” Irritated by the possible claims of superiority that the West would be self-legit-

imizing towards Eastern countries (perceived in “quarantine” or that “standardized test . . . that you pass or not”), Paleologu refuses an East-West diagnosis according to hierarchical criteria, insisting on “historical differences, social conditions and good fortune at the same time, not in the least the essence of difference.”

The polemic will go on until 1996. Probably considering it concluded, Laurențiu Ulici presents the conclusions in a text entitled “National and European—an Addendum to a Polemic,”¹¹ bringing nuance to it by introducing the conceptual dichotomies of “national–nationalism,” “European–Europeanist” (with the “mondialist” addition), of which the first term would be preferable: “If *nationalism* is the perfidious and ludicrous enemy of the *national*, isn’t *Europeanism* in a similar relationship with the *European*? I think it is, even more so as both nationalism and Europeanism are chiefly discriminatory . . . Is there not a functional attribute for the *European* as patriotism is for the national? I believe it exists, and its name could be universalism, with the meaning from Christian tradition, but also with the meaning from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. For a more precise semantic coverage, some prefer the term ‘mondialism.’” And if in terms of Europeanist or European-nationalist priorities Ulici says both parties are right, but, in his opinion, Gabriel Andreescu is right for now and the other two in the long run.¹²

Gabriel Andreescu restarted the discussion, publishing in 1996, in 8 issues of *Dilema*¹³ a series called “National Interest, Intellectual Profile.” The two positions are redefined and their relation to the “national interest” and an “intellectual profile” (with enough ironic and even minimizing touches) is sketched for Paler and Paleologu. A first issue separating the two camps would be the “problem of the individual and the collectivity” and the relation to them: “In my opinion, this preponderance of the *universal dimension of the human being*—who after the Second World War found a political-international recognition—is the clearest difference between anti-nationalists and nationalists. *There is nothing about our national specificity that I can accept as having priority over the dignity of the human being, in its individuality.*” In Andreescu’s quite outspoken opinion, Paler and Paleologu might confuse nationalism with anti-Western sentiment, on the one hand, and might operate with an obsolete conception of nationalism, on the other hand:

To consider states today as expressions of ethnic nations is an outdated conception and in conflict with international law, at least as it has developed in the European space . . . the Romanian state (for example) is not the expression of the Romanians will in this country, but the expression of Romanians will, together with the will of the Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Roma, Armenians and others who live on this territory which belongs to everyone. Such an understanding is called “nationalism in a civic sense,” precisely to make a separation from the outdated ethnic outlook on the nation. . . . For me, the freedom of Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, their welfare and dignity are more important than whether they are under the same state jurisdiction as us or not. . . . Those concerned primarily with rights and dignity investigate violations of freedoms in the neighboring country, preparing reports for OSCE missions in the area that might require the government in Chișinău to respect the will of ethno-cultural groups . . . and the like.

Nationalist and traditionalist reporting, which he accuses Paler of, is based, according to Andreescu, on several strengths: “the appeal to history,” “the peasant legacy,” “the national church.” In a typical modernist fashion, the “peasant legacy” is presented as the main inhibitor of affiliation to the European Union because of its local character (closed community) and the lack of adherence to the values of political and social modernity (in this case, the civic spirit). In other words, Andreescu rejects one of the important terms of the polemic through attributes specific to the other: “In my opinion, there are two important remarks in this regard. The first: the contradiction between peasant mentality and civic conscience. In fact, those who relate to peasant tradition refuse or do not realize the fundamental importance of civic spirit in the life of modern societies. The traditional peasant community, invoked by older or newer nationalists, is the perfect model of what Popper called ‘closed societies’. . . . Another obstacle these communities have in adapting . . . to the requirements of today’s life is not being willing to innovate extensively.”

Therefore, beyond being “inadequate” or “conservative,” Paler’s solution would be irresponsible, considering its effects on Romanian public opinion.

Somewhat amazed at the resurgence of the polemic, Paler publishes in response another series in 4 issues of *România liberă*.¹⁴ In his opinion, Andreescu might be “A Bizarre Case”: “He seems just like a robot, programmed to repeat ad nauseam some ideas that make you think of a referent who discovered that the theme of ‘Europeanity’ is very profitable. . . . What particularly disturbs me is the gnawing feeling Mr. Andreescu’s words betray a phobia of everything that is Romanian. . . . I understand now. Mr. Andreescu would like to say ‘civic identity’ instead of ‘national identity’ and ‘civic state’ instead of ‘national state.’ Interesting, right? When are we going to say ‘civic people’ instead of ‘Romanian people,’ Mr. Andreescu?” Without any additional ideas except for previous ones, the debate continues in the 22 magazine (no. 31, 31 July–6 August 1996) with two other interventions: Gabriel Andreescu, “An Open Letter to Mr. Octavian Paler,” dated 28 June 1996, and Octavian Paler, “An Open Reply to Mr. Gabriel Andreescu,” dated 27 July 1996). But there might be a new nuance—Paler suspects the interlocutor’s “Europeanism” of a certain filo-Hungarian bias: “And how come Mister Andreescu never had any problem with anti-Romanian attitudes exhibited by Hungarian extremists? I hasten to add that I strongly disapprove of interethnic tensions, I am sickened by those who hate Hungarians and believe in minority rights to fully preserve their identity. But, unfortunately, Hungarians also have their *Vadims* and their *Funars*. Isn’t extremism reprehensible on any side? Therefore, should I infer that, for Mr. Andreescu, hate is contemptible only when it is clamored in Romanian?”

At the end of 1996 Virgil Nemoianu¹⁵ also intervened in the polemic. From this “modern version of the discourse on imitation and identity” that crosses Romanian culture, Nemoianu appears to agree with Paler rather than with the advocates of “Western mimetism.” Along the lines of pragmatism specific to classical neo-conservatism, the author breaks down Andreescu’s abstract terms into real referents, invoking the differences and ultimately not seeking a static ordering classification, but one in harmony with the dynamics of the contemporary world:

Romania, for instance, wants to “integrate”—but with whom and with what? This “Euro-Atlantic” world is, in fact, an abstraction: the situation in Portugal is radically different from the situation in Norway, between France and the United States there are many thick lines of demarcation, the interests of Canada are not the same as the ones in Greece, and so on. Who do we want to align with, who do we imitate? Or on the contrary: with whom do we not match, whom do we not imitate? And there is a more pressing issue. Which part of the Western world is the one we look up to? . . . The model cannot and must not be a static one (the Euro-Atlantic stance at a specific hour on a specific day), but rather the dynamics of this world, its movement and development, the way it has advanced and has behaved historically for centuries. If the imitation relates to a historical-geographic ensemble of a civilization, then there is no need for the Romanian world to resort to painful abandonment of its own identity, there is no need for grotesque adaptations (and, ultimately, ineffective) in details.

Although he did not properly intervene in the polemic, Adrian Marino’s position is worth mentioning, especially since he published (1995) a volume entitled *Pentru Europa: Integrarea României* (For Europe: Romania’s integration). Leaving behind the author’s well-known ideological idiosyncrasies (for instance, his hostility to rural spirituality), his solution has the merit of suggesting a third way, especially applicable to the cultural sphere: “to bring Europe ‘home’ as an equivalent to the rather obsessive ‘to enter Europe.’” In Marino’s opinion, this choice implies overcoming two remarkable complexes: of superiority and inferiority of the Romanian culture. The first would be the “Dinicu Golescu complex” and the “complex of the Western ‘canon,’”¹⁶ explicable as a reaction to the conceited Eurocentric attitude characteristic of the great Western cultures (indifferent to the values of the East). Hence the mimetic and hasty synchronization trend, the obsession of cultural delay (false). Like Virgil Nemoianu,¹⁷ Marino also opposes Western monocentrism and suggests a polycentric perspective (pluralism of the centers of influence). The other complex is the Eastern one, which corresponds either to the exaltation of the original phenomenon (the Thracian obsession, the various variants of extreme nationalism, etc.), or to the “left out brother’s feeling” (which Constantin Noica referred to). Beyond the stake of pure hasty synchronization or obsessive-nationalistic closure, Marino’s ideal is “to be Romanian and European at the same time,” which in cultural terms would mean creating “Romanian works of significance and international value.”¹⁸

ONE WILL find the two main voices of the debate, Gabriel Andreescu and Octavian Paler, taking the same irreconcilable positions a few years later over the Yugoslav War (the bombing of Serbia by NATO forces being seen as an inevitable measure by the “modernists of integration,” to use an expression right from that time). But this is a matter worth considering separately, because in its general lines, the debate is only vaguely similar to the one analyzed in the present pages. It is rather a set of attitudes or ideological positions specific to one profile or another. An excerpt from one of Octavian Paler’s interventions is relevant for the distance between the two types of reporting:

In a recent article in 22 magazine, G. A. is even more radical than NATO on the issue of the future of Kosovo province, accepting only the solution of secession, as UCK. “Autonomy” seems to be too little, “an unnecessary and embarrassing standstill.” As a matter of fact, Mister Andreescu warns us, though Romanians were fed with the “clichés of sovereignty,” we must get used to the “eventual secession of some populations.” New rules “shall come into force if a new Kosovo state will ask for its recognition tomorrow,” because, “considering its new importance in the world,” NATO can “increasingly” solve some ethnic conflicts on the verge of secession. Could it be a far-fetched theory? Possibly. But it also gives rise to “collateral” ascertainment. A few weeks after various heavyweights in power were busy making fun of the “Kosovo precedent,” some extremists from UDMR [Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania] did not hesitate to send Bill Clinton a letter asking him to intervene to stop ethnic cleansing in Transylvania. You are dumbfounded. What cleansing are they talking about? What kind of good man can make a parallel between what happened in Kosovo and our reality? As I expected, Mister Andreescu was not troubled by the encouragement to “Kosovization.” Instead, he finds it fitting to use terms such as “ethnic opponents” and “incitements” to describe other people’s concerns!¹⁹

Thus it is impossible to draw some conclusions as long as the polemic keeps spiraling, in surprising and changing forms, between the same or other actors. The aim of such polemics is not only to indicate solutions to problems, but to act as outstanding minute observations of the crises that periodically permeate Romanian culture (and not only) as an offshoot of Bovarism, nostalgia or “cursed insoluble issues” of our tormented modernity, which refuses to die precisely because, at a key moment, it was prevented from living.

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Notes

1. For the present discussion, but without touching upon the views expressed in the polemics, the very perception of the concept of “national” would be significant if combined with the decryption of the Ceaușescu-nationalist key (meanwhile out of use). In other words, the “national” does not seem to be a valid or necessary concept in the 1990s. One should also consider the entire right–left (or perhaps “right”–“left”) debate that lasted from the 1990s until the 2000s, as well as the reception of Eminescu’s criterionists; meanwhile, Nae Ionescu’s students were mentioned in the debates regarding “collaborationism,” a sticking point in those years (used by the “right” against the “left” or vice versa).
2. Urs Altermatt, *Previziunile de la Sarajevo: Etnonaționalismul în Europa*, transl. Johan Klusch, foreword by Andrei Corbea (Iași: Polirom, 2000), 164.
3. Gabriel Andreescu, “Privirile îndreptate spre Republica Moldova ori spre Ungaria?” *Contrapunct* (Bucharest) 6, 6 (June 1995): 8–9. All Gabriel Andreescu’s interventions were published by him in the volume *Naționaliști, antinaționaliști: O polemică în publicistica românească*, ed. Gabriel Andreescu (Iași: Polirom, 1996). A description of the main interventions can also be found in the *Cronologia vieții literare românești: Perioada postcomunistă*, ed. Eugen Simion, vol. 6, 1995 (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2015), 286–298.

4. *Contrapunct* 6, 9 (September 1995): 8–9.
5. Octavian Paler, “Spinoasa problemă a identității,” *România liberă* (Bucharest), nos. 1683, 1686, 1689, October 6, 10 and 13, 1995.
6. Gabriel Andreescu, “Octavian Paler, Alexandru Paleologu și spinoasa problemă a naționalismului,” 22 (Bucharest) 6, 43–47 (25 October–28 November 1995).
7. “From my point of view, the texts of the honourable columnist of *România liberă* are an essential part of the anti-Western propaganda in the Romanian press. . . . it is much easier and therefore more expensive in the long run for the public opinion to be seduced by Mister Octavian Paler’s ‘carefully worded’ speech, who urges it to be wary of Western civilization in the name of an identity too hard to define,” stated Andreescu at some point.
8. Octavian Paler, “Între naționaliștii de grotă și europenii de nicăieri,” nos. 46–51, from 15 November to 27 December 1995.
9. We draw on this term as it was used by French critic Antoine Compagnon, *Les Antimodernes: De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). In the author’s opinion, especially valid regarding the European space, the concept would no longer apply after the pivotal moment of 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall marking the end of modernity). In our opinion, such verdicts should be nuanced for Eastern countries, most of them having experienced a deviated process of modernization after the Second World War. And to the extent and purpose of this debate, Paler’s position (more than that Paleologu’s) seems to belong to a (straggling) antimodernist.
10. In an article published in *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) 5, 3 (1994), reprinted in the volume *Politețea ca armă: Convorbiri și articole mai mult sau mai puțin politice* (Cluj: Dacia, 2000), 68–70.
11. Laurențiu Ulici, “Național și european—o addenda la o polemică,” *Privirea* (Bucharest), nos. 2, 3 and 4, 1996.
12. Here is the quote: “If we accept that justice is the circumstantial revelation of the truth, then Mister Andreescu is the one who is right by clearly stating that Romania’s priority represents its connection to the European universalism of human and minority rights. However, it is very possible that tomorrow, in another European context, in another situation of Romania in Europe, Paler and Paleologu might be right.”
13. Gabriel Andreescu, “Interes național, profil intelectual,” *Dilema* (Bucharest) 4, 176 (24–30 May 1996)–183 (12–18 July 1996).
14. No. 1892, 18 June; no. 1895, 21 June; no. 1898, 25 June; no. 1901, 28 June.
15. Virgil Nemoianu, “Imitație și identitate”, dated “Bethesda, MD, November 1996,” 22, 7, 49 (4–10 December 1996).
16. Adrian Marino, *Pentru Europa: Integrarea României: Aspecte ideologice și culturale* (Iași: Polirom, 1995), 76.
17. Virgil Nemoianu, “Bătălia canonică—de la critica americană la cultura română,” *România literară* (Bucharest) 23, 41 (11 October 1990).
18. Marino, 78–79.
19. *Cronologia vieții literare românești: Perioada postcomunistă*, gen. ed. Eugen Simion, vol. 10, 1999 (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2016), 240–241.

Abstract

An Unresolved Polemic of Romanian Modernity in the Cultural Press of 1995–1996

In this paper, we present an extensive polemic of the 1995–1996 cultural press, driven by the imminence of joining the European Union and the dilemmas brought about by this option. Thus, one of the debates that marked Romanian culture (Europeanism/national specificity) resumed in a special form in the post–1989 context. This fact is eloquent both for the specificity of Romanian modernity (whose scores have not been settled), but also for the manner in which the Romanian intellectual discourse synchronizes with that in other Southeast European countries (where similar discussions took place).

Keywords

modernity, debate, postcommunism, European integration, Yugoslav War