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CONVERGENCE OR REPLACEMENT?
ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICAL AND
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN
CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

Unlike other Post-Communist countries, Romania displays three clear individual-level trends related to political and religious institutions. The Romanians are the most supportive for the EU and Church, and the most critical towards national political institutions in the region. By conducting an empirical longitudinal study on the Romanian population, we aim to understand the linkages between these two trends and to identify what can explain the high level of trust vested by the Romanian citizens in the Orthodox Church in the post-Communist period. In doing so, we test two alternative explanations and we employ bivariate and multivariate statistics. The results indicate that there is weak evidence for the relationship between trust in political and religious institutions, with a stronger emphasis on the EU aspect. Whenever the attitudes are linked, they are consistent: positive attitudes towards the national government and Parliament trigger positive attitudes towards the Church.

Introduction

The breakdown of Communism and the sudden disintegration of USSR transformed the former “Iron Curtain” countries into seekers of systems to replace the old regime – both in economic and political terms. Using Huntington’s conceptual language about the third wave of democratization, the political transition from autocracy to democracy rests on a premise that a regression to the political *status quo ante* is unlikely¹. As examples from the regions show up, this paradigmatic shift does not imply successful democratization. One can identify four distinct categories of the former Communist states according to their level of democratization: (1) states that democratized (the EU joiners), (2) states that returned to the former regime (Belarus), (3) states that chose a different type of an authoritarian regime than before (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan), and (4) states that did not clearly define their course (Russia).

Out of the new democratic countries that became EU members in less than two decades from the regime change, Romania displays three

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contrasting features in the European surveys². First of all, until recently all the candidate countries shared a common feature: their citizens displayed high levels of support for the EU, some 10% above the old member states support average³. In this cluster of optimism, Romania is the most supportive country with an average support around 75%. Second, the level of trust in national institutions is considerably lower compared to international institutions and among the smallest in the region. Between a quarter and one third of Romanians declare confidence in the institutions that should represent and govern them. The slow institutional development, the lack of political reforms, and extended corruption scandals that characterize the post-Communist political environment may explain these reluctant attitudes. Moreover, there are considerably more transition losers than winners⁴ and the negative attitudes may be associated with thoughts of punishment. Third, Romania is the champion of confidence in the Church, with levels comparable to those displayed by Western Catholic Countries and by far the most supportive among the Orthodox countries. At the same time, the Church is the most supported institution, with four out of five Romanians declaring constant support for the Church.

These clearly observable trends provide a blurry picture and a puzzling situation. Although at first sight it may appear that trust in national institutions is lowered at the expense of trust in international institutions, a recent study finds no relationship between the two: Romanians are supportive towards the EU irrespective of their trust in national institutions.⁵ If the absence of this relationship is clear, what happens with the other two possible connections? On the one hand, it is unclear if the trust in Church grows at the expense of political institutions, the former being seen as an alternative to the corrupt and unappealing political class. If so, it is necessary to discover the mechanisms that lead citizens to vest more confidence in a hierarchical, non-democratic and non-transparent institution than to political representation and government bodies. The puzzle becomes even more complicated when we think that these political institutions represent the alternative to Communism, a regime where religion was officially forbidden. On the other hand, it is unclear why religion and confidence in the EU go hand in hand. The latter may be considered a threat to national identity, whereas the Orthodox Church may represent the guarantee for Romanian traditions, as well as cultural and religious preservation. This conservative character and discourse of the Church does not correspond to the continuous discourse towards development initiated at the EU level. However, if the EU is considered the opposite of Communism, better fulfilling the tasks of national institutions, then positive attitudes towards both Church and the EU may be justified. To solve this puzzle, we try to answer the following research question: *What can explain the high level of trust vested by the Romanian citizens in the Orthodox Church in the post-*

Communist period? In doing so, we test two alternative explanations that target the relationship between the above mentioned variables by conducting longitudinal research on surveys collected at European level.

Answering this question is relevant for two main reasons. First, it addresses this dilemma from an empirical perspective, complementing the extensive descriptions and analyses that emphasize the role of the Church in Romanian society.⁶ By explaining attitudinal trends in the most recent decade, focusing on three individual-level factors, one will set the grounds for further research. Second, this study adds to the rather limited post-Communist public opinion literature, quite often consisting mostly of attitudes towards the EU.⁷ This study tests two potential explanatory variables for the high level of trust in religious institutions: confidence in domestic political institutions and in the EU. The first is useful in the context of the increased role of domestic political institutions in society's life, whereas the second has, to our knowledge, not been tested for Romania before.

Our article summarizes first the main explanations in the relevant literature and advances two specific hypotheses that include the factors that are theoretically important for understanding public support for the Church in Romania. Second, we test the hypotheses by conducting bivariate analyses involving cross-tabulations and logistic regression. We conclude by reflecting on the findings, their implications, and on future research on public support for religious institutions in a new EU member state.

Theoretical Expectations

A starting point in our attempt to draw a theoretical framework for analysis is to emphasize the dichotomy between Eastern and Western Christianity with respect to its relationship to political power. Thus, it has to be pointed out that – in contrast to the Western political tradition that emphasizes political pluralism, the separation of powers (including the separation between the religious and the secular), and the checks and balances system – the Eastern European countries were characterized by highly centralized states and weak societies and by the continuous intermingling between the State and the Church.⁸ Whereas the former witnessed the rivalry between the ruler and the Church creating the possibility of a third group of autonomous parties (i.e. commercial, scientific, and urban) to emerge,⁹ in Eastern Europe, especially within the predominantly Orthodox countries, the Byzantine concept of *symphonia*, which designates “the cooperation between the Church and state in the fulfillment of their goals, each supporting the other and neither being subordinated to the other” bound the state and the Church so closely together that the latter becomes a state Church.¹⁰ Consequently, the state was dominant and the society very weak.¹¹

Such a situation determined many researchers to deny the Orthodox Church a positive role in democratic consolidation in this part of Europe after the fall of communism. Thus, although widely acknowledging the role that religious institutions, personalities and ideas played in the process of democratization across a wide range of societies, most social scientists who have studied this phenomenon tended to argue that Catholic and Protestant forms of Christianity are compatible with democracy, ignoring or dismissing Orthodox Christianity as incompatible with it.¹² Very few others have tried to prove that Orthodoxy is also compatible with democracy, in theory and in practice, though having to admit that the Orthodox Churches “often display a certain ambivalence about key elements of the pluralism that characterizes democratic regimes.”¹³

In Romania, in compliance with the Byzantine model of *symphonia*, the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) had a constant policy of accommodation with the rulers of the day, which allowed it a privileged status among the other religious denominations, including during the communist period¹⁴ and after 1989, and often positioned itself in opposition to the languidly emergent civil society.¹⁵ As opposed to the other dominant Churches in Central Europe, which after the fall of communism, remained part of the civil society whose activity counterbalances the state, the ROC (just as the Orthodox Churches in the Balkans and in the former Soviet Union) remained an ally of the state rather than part of the civil society.¹⁶ In this respect, the ROC had numerous attempts and aggressive campaigns for its recognition as the national Church¹⁷ (in 1994, for instance, it proclaimed itself as the national Church¹⁸), and despite being unsuccessful, “proved that the Orthodox Church rejects the notion that Romania is a religiously plural country and is prepared to go the extremes to gain *de jure* recognition for its *de facto* domination as *primus inter pares* among the religious denominations of Romania.”¹⁹ Also, the enduring dispute surrounding the construction of a new Orthodox cathedral put the ROC at odds with the civil society. Thus, while for the Church the cathedral “symbolizes the central place Orthodoxy occupies in the heart and mind of the nation...and serves as a symbolic compensation for the failure of politicians to grant the Orthodox Church national Church status”, “for civil society, the cathedral represents a symbol of intolerance, clericalism, a waste of resources or, more importantly, a shameful rewriting of the recent past aimed at recasting the Orthodox Church from a supporter to a critic of the communist regime.”²⁰

It must also be recalled that after 1989, the ROC tried very hard to acquire a special status in the Romanian Constitution and political establishment, which would grant the Orthodox clergy reserved seats in the Parliament, would make the religious education compulsory, would maintain the legislation against homosexuals and abortion and would refuse to return the disputed properties to the Greek Catholics.²¹ With all means, the ROC tried to secure its benefits (legal or patrimonial, and also

those of symbolic authority) by tightening its relationship with the central and local authorities.²² Indeed, after 1989, the government granted the ROC many advantages, including the introduction of religious education in public schools, and an increased presence on the state-controlled media. Moreover, the ROC was close to being recognized officially as the national church, in 1999, when prime minister Radu Vasile amended the draft of a new religious law in favor of the Orthodox Church.²³

Therefore, instead of positioning itself in the ranks of civil society and thus contributing to the consolidation of democracy in Romania, after 1989, the ROC made constant attempts to ally with the state and to receive advantages from this alliance.

And, as observers note, the weakness or inertia of civil society may represent a basic limitation so far on democratic consolidation across the region.²⁴ These developments, among others, made researchers argue that ROC “is acting in a way injurious to the development of a stable and functioning liberal democracy in Romania.”²⁵

However, for its disparaged image, and despite the fact that many deny the Orthodox Church a positive role in Romania’s democratization process, the ROC managed to present itself in a favorable light, or as a “martyr Church”²⁶ thus gaining the trust of four in five Romanians.²⁷ And it is worth noting that the high level of confidence in the Church goes hand in hand with the lack of confidence in the democratic institutions of state in Romania. How can this be?

As some studies show, the more a democracy is stable and perceived as “satisfactory” and the less corrupt it is, the more people trust the state’s institutions.²⁸ In Romania, however, the transition process after 1989 was dominated for a long time by former regime elements and this created difficulties for democratic consolidation.²⁹ The continuity of the old communist-style politics and the persistence of old communist elites with Leninist mentalities on the political scene for so many years after the revolution in Romania³⁰ might have contributed to the bad image earned by the political institutions. “Romania’s postcommunists did not free themselves from authoritarian reflexes when they became ‘pro-European,’” and “the democratization process has been slower than in all other postcommunist countries in the region,” being “bogged down by its postcommunist legacy – widespread pessimism and apathy, political dilettantism, clientelism, and a level of corruption that the EU Foreign Affairs Commission diplomatically called “a major source of concern,” as some scholars observed.³¹

In this context, it seems like the Orthodox Church managed to “capitalize on other political actors’ loss of capital in the face of the hardships of transition,” since “both the institutions ranking highest in popularity polls, the Church and the army, are non-elected, strictly hierarchical bodies which have neither been involved directly in the economic life of Romanians nor required to propose concrete programmes

of socioeconomic rehabilitation.”³² The dissatisfaction with the political class was voiced even by some Orthodox leaders such as Archbishop Anania who, in the mid 1998 (a few years after the failed attempt of the ROC to coerce President Iliescu to grant Synod members senatorial seats), as a counterpoise to “the unwanted who rule us”, “proposed that the Church select candidates for parliamentary mandates, and that priests urge believers during sermons to vote for people whom the Church trusted.”³³

As a result, we hypothesize that in the Romanian case, the Church replaces the political institutions that should bring democracy closer to the citizens. Accordingly, we expect those respondents that do not trust domestic political institutions to vest more confidence in ROC:

H1: People that lack trust in national political institutions have the tendency to trust the Church compared with the rest of citizens.

With respect to the second problem raised above, there are several elements that would make us conceive the relationship between ROC and the EU as a problematic one and would make us believe that the ROC would have a negative stance towards the EU. It cannot be denied, for instance, that many of the EU’s values run contrary to those promoted by ROC.³⁴ There was at least one particular moment when the latter’s doctrine came in harsh conflict with the European Union’s demand – the abrogation of the Constitution’s Article 200 that considers homosexuality as a crime.³⁵ In this respect, the old law, which prohibited homosexuality, was endorsed by the majority of the Romanians and also by the other religious denominations. However, the most vociferous were the orthodox personalities. One example is that of the then Archbishop and now Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, who said that “Europe prompts us to accept homosexuality, electronics, drugs, abortion, and genetic engineering. Therefore joining this ‘impoverished, despiritualised’ union is pointless, especially since ‘in terms of culture and civilisation we have been there first.’”³⁶

Moreover, the persistent symphonia model³⁷ of the relations between State and Church, or, to say it more directly, the status of a “pseudo-state church” of the ROC,³⁸ runs contrary to the separation between the two promoted in Western Europe³⁹ and the integration in the EU would mean a waning influence of the ROC in the political realm.⁴⁰

Also, the integration in the EU could be perceived as a threat to the national identity of the member states and given that the Romanian national identity partially overlaps the orthodox identity, we would expect the ROC to have a reticent attitude towards the EU. In this context, the ROC’s attempts to position itself as pivotal for the very definition of ‘Romanianism’ since the emergence of the national consciousness in

Europe, must be recalled.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, Orthodoxy represented an important element in the forging and defense of the national identity in the course of history, both in Moldavia and Wallachia (known as “The Old Kingdom”) and also in Transylvania, where, despite the fact that the population was more ethnically and religiously diverse when compared to the Old Kingdom⁴², the importance of the Orthodox church “as a defender of religion and promoter of Romanian nationalism was even more marked than in the Old Kingdom,” due to the official politics of the Magyarization of all ethnic groups, during the second half of the 19th century.⁴³ Some authors also emphasize the role played by the Orthodox Church in the construction of the Romanian state, after the unification of the principalities, “by reinforcing the mythologizing of political figures from the Romanian past, thus making a connection between the newly-established state and previous rulers.”⁴⁴

Given the fact that even after 1989, in its attempts to restore its prestige, the ROC constantly emphasized the link between Orthodoxy and “Romanianism” and the crucial task of preserving the Romanian identity in the face of modernization, globalization, secularization and religious proselytism,⁴⁵ we would expect the ROC to have a reticent attitude towards the EU, as already mentioned.

Another reason for the Orthodox Church’s reticence toward the EU would be the fact that the origins of the European project lies with some very committed Catholic and Christian Democratic politicians and the Romanian Orthodox Church’s nationalism was traditionally seen as being associated with a bias against Western European Christianity.⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, we would expect the Church to use its influence in opposing the EU and in undermining people’s confidence in the EU. But data shows an increased level of confidence in both institutions. One stream of literature contends that the strength of the Orthodox Church in Romania may have helped push public opinion toward integration with Europe and explain thus the high level of confidence in both institutions. Some authors⁴⁷ explain the apparent contradiction between ROC’s interests and actions towards the EU by arguing that under the pressure of the believers’ secular goals – the desire to accomplish the century old dream of joining in the European kind of modernity, and at times instrumented by the state (in exchange for the advantages that the state granted the Church due to the historically close relationship between them), the ROC had to “prove that it was open to the new and did not dwell on reminiscences from the past.” Accordingly, the ROC tried to assess the compatibility between Orthodox spirituality and the European Union and involved actively in the process. Others consider that the marginalized status of the Churches during the communist period made them want to embrace the democratic values of the West.⁴⁸ This line of argument emphasizes the Romanian Orthodox Church’s power in shaping the

political opinions of the population and its ability to influence people's attitudes.

In this sense, the literature reveals few theoretical and empirical studies on the issue of religion affecting the attitudes toward the European Union. Mac Iver (1989)⁴⁹ was one of the few researchers who considered the role of religiosity in the shaping of the attitudes of western Europeans toward the EC. In the '80s she argued that those who claim that their religious beliefs play a role in their political preferences reveal a higher level of support for the EC and she explained that by emphasizing the transnational character of Christian social teaching. According to her observations, Catholicism is the most supportive for EU integration, followed by Orthodoxy (both universalistic in orientation), while Protestantism (more particularistic) is more skeptical and reticent toward the integration and toward any project intended to weaken the force of the nation state, since the nation states have historically guaranteed its survival over time. Later, the role of religion as a determinant of people's attitudes toward European integration and the EU was emphasized in a series of studies.⁵⁰ In one of their studies, Fraser, Nelson and Guth demonstrated that there is a connection between religious affiliation and religious commitment on the one hand and the attitudes toward the European Community on the other hand. Thus, they proved that Catholics and Orthodox are more positive about the integration, while Protestants are less enthusiastic, secularists and sectarians being even less supportive than Protestants – testing therefore Mac Iver's observations more than a decade ago. "Thus, there appears to be a religious continuum from the most "universalistic" Churches to the most "particularistic", with the former favoring the Community and the latter much less enthusiastic." They also demonstrated that the stronger the religious commitment, the stronger support for European integration. "Although the traditions differ in their level of support for the EU, within each tradition Churchgoers are more pro-integration."⁵¹

Nelsen and Guth made the first attempt at exploring the impact of religion on attitudes toward European integration in post-communist Europe, paying particular attention to the role of religious tradition and Church attendance to the formation of attitudes.⁵² They argue that the Christian religion is a strong predictor for the people's attitudes towards the EU due to four main reasons. First, it has a strong universalist tendency in order to spread their religion and attain disciples. Second, the Church is against the modern state. It considers that the unity of all believers is made visible in their own Churches and distrusts the modern nation states that have so deeply and disastrously divided Europe. Thus, they see the EU as an alternative to the current situation and also a way to diminish the unity of Church's contesters (e.g. Protestants). Third, one of the cultural pillars of the EU is the Christian religion, founded by Catholic or predominantly Catholic countries in the 1950s that were led by Christian Democratic

politicians. Finally, the EU means a larger community and the Church encourages such a behavior for opposing individualism.⁵³

Other studies emphasized the relationship between the attitudes toward European accession and democratic hopes, suggesting that people looked to the EU to help strengthen democracy.⁵⁴ In Romania, the strong support for the EU could also reflect a frustration with the functioning of national institutions,⁵⁵ as Romania has been largely unable to ensure a proper functioning of the democratic institutions and in introducing adequate anti-corruption measures.⁵⁶ Democracy in Romania is still unstable and unconsolidated and therefore, “more open to conditionality impacts” (from the EU).⁵⁷ Given these two directions in the literature, we expect to observe a direct relationship between confidence in the EU and in the Church:

H2: Respondents that have confidence in the EU display a higher level of trust towards the Church compared with the rest of citizens.

Data, variables, and measurement

To test the hypotheses, we use candidate countries and standard Eurobarometer survey data from 2002 to 2007. Since our hypotheses try to longitudinally identify individual-level mechanisms and connections, these surveys are appropriate as they include large comparable datasets in terms of standardized questionnaires, sampling method and data collection. Trust in Church or religious institutions and in the EU is operationalized as the answer of the Romanian respondents to questions directly involving these issues: “How much trust do you have in ...?” There are three response alternatives: “tend to trust” (1), “tend not to trust” (2), and “don’t know” (3). All respondents providing the latter answer were eliminated from the sample, being considered missing values.

For the first hypothesis, the level of trust in domestic political institutions needs to be assessed. Consequently, we create a new variable that combines the level of trust in the national legislature and government as these are the institutions that clearly prevails over other political actors in the state.⁵⁸ The Eurobarometer questionnaires have two separate questions, similar with those for Church and the EU that ask the citizens about the trust in Parliament and government, both with dichotomous answers of trust/do not trust. We code trust as 1 and the lack of trust as 0 for each of the two institutions and the new variable (i.e. the index of trust in domestic political institutions) is the sum of these scores (i.e. minimum value 0, maximum value 2). Individuals that do not express their confidence in national institutions (“do not know”) are treated as missing values.

We use two conceptual equivalences. First, we consider as synonymous the Church and the religious institutions. In the first survey

we used, the question of trust refers to Church, whereas in the rest of the surveys the questions refer to trust in religious institutions. The most familiar religious institution to most Romanians is the Church and the identity of the two in their perceptions can be easily argued. Second, without information on the religious affiliation of the respondents (Orthodox, Catholic, etc) we assume that the used sample includes a fairly reduced number of non-Orthodox respondents, similar to what statistics indicate and thus it does not bias our conclusions regarding ROC. Additionally, we make the assumption that levels of confidence in the Catholic and Orthodox Church do not differ considerably.

We start our analysis with bivariate statistics (cross-tabulations) to test the hypothesized relationships between variables, whereas the final part of our analysis focuses on binary logistic regression that allows one to investigate the extent to which trust in domestic political institutions and in the EU explains the high levels of confidence in the religious institutions.

Stability in attitudes towards the Church

The puzzling trends described at the beginning of this article are consistent with the figures included in table 1. These elements of descriptive statistics illustrate how the trust in the Church, in the EU and the lack of trust in domestic political institutions evolved between 2002 and 2007. These figures are consistent with, but slightly different from, the aggregate reports summarizing the results of the Eurobarometers in every country. The reason is represented by the elimination of the missing values and the weighting of every variable within the survey. Thus, some of the percentages indicate a clearer trend that we initially expect. As we can easily observe, the trust in religious institutions is stable, with a peak of 90% of respondents declaring support for the Church in 2002 and the lowest level in 2006 (81%). However, the relevance of these small oscillations is decreased when looking at the error generated by the sampling methods. Consequently, we can assess that nine out of ten Romanians display consistent support for the Church in the analyzed period of time.

Table 1: Trust in Church, national institutions and the EU

Romania	Percentage/Year					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Trust in Church	90	85	86	86	81	83
Lack of trust in national institutions	57	60	57	65	66	74
Trust in the EU	80	74	85	76	77	76

810 ≤ N ≤ 977

Source: CCEBs and EBs, 2002-2007.

High values and triggered fluctuations are seen with respect to the lack of trust in national political institutions. Overall, almost two thirds of the Romanian citizens display a lack of confidence in their main political representatives. There is a peak of 74% (2007) of citizens that trust neither their government nor legislature and two minimal points of 57% in 2002 and 2004. Two periods may be distinguished along the six years: their lack of trust in national institutions is stable until 2004, and starting in 2005 its increase by an average of 10% becomes visible. Without speculating on this decrease after 2004, it is relevant to notice that the trust in the EU also decreases after that year. Regarding the latter, the EU was trusted by eight out of ten Romanians until 2004, their percentage becoming stable around three quarters of the population after that moment. Overall, we may think that Romanians became more skeptical about the political institutions after 2004 without distinguishing between national and international layers of these institutions.

These general trends strengthen the initial puzzle and lead us to an investigation of the bivariate relationships between the trust in Church and the trust in domestic political institutions on the one hand, and international institutions on the other hand (cross-tabulations from tables 2 and 3). These tables contain the relevant percentages and a measure of the strength of the relationship as indicated by the correlation coefficient (*somer's d*).

National politics and religion: together for better and worse

Table 2 presents the percentages of people that display supportive attitudes for the domestic political institutions and Church. For the entire analyzed period we observe a relatively weak, but statistically significant positive relationship between the trust attitudes. These trends go against our expectation that a lack of trust in domestic political institutions coincides with more trust vested in the religious institution. People that do not trust their national political institutions are least likely to trust the Church when compared to those that have medium or high trust in the national decision-makers (column one, rows 10-15). The highest level of

trust is registered for people that trust both institutions (column three, rows 10-15). For example, in 2003 the trust for the Church was 79% among the Romanians that do not trust their major national institutions, 86% among the group that trusts only one of the two institutions, and 95% among the citizens that held positive attitudes towards both government and Parliament.

At the same time, the difference between the group of people that trust the Church and only one institution (i.e. medium) and the people that trust both political institutions (95%) and the Church is smaller than the difference of percentages between those that trust the Church and fall in the medium (90%) and lack of trust (approximately 80%) categories for the domestic institutions.

Table 2. Trust in political and religious institutions

Trust in Church?	Trust in national institutions		
	Lack	Medium	Trust
<i>No</i>			
2002	13%	5%	4%
2003	21	14	5
2004	18	11	9
2005	18	14	4
2006	24	12	9
2007	21	15	4
<i>Yes</i>			
2002	87%	95%	96%
2003	79	86	95
2004	82	89	91
2005	82	86	96
2006	76	88	91
2007	79	85	96
<i>Strength of relationship</i>			
2002	0.15		
2003	0.18		
2004	0.1		
2005	0.14		
2006	0.16		
2007	0.14		

Notes:

- For the frequency table on trust in Church and in national institutions, see Table 1.
- All relationships are significant at the 0.01 level.
- $866 \leq N \leq 922$
- Source CCEBs and EBs, 2002-2007.

A close look at the lack of trust in Church complements these findings and provides a clearer picture that strengthens the evidence that goes against the hypothesized relationship. For the entire analyzed period, one in five Romanians who lack trust in political institutions has a similar attitude towards the religious institutions. According to our hypothesis, we

would expect to see people that trust both political institutions to most distrust the Church. The empirical reality shows that approximately five in 100 Romanians are satisfied with the work of their representative institutions mention that they do not trust the Church, the smallest percentage of all. The intermediary values are registered among the respondents that have trust in one of the political institutions (approximately 10%).

In a nutshell, the evidence goes against hypothesis 1. Contrary to theoretical reasons and expectations, for the period 2002-2007 Romanians who do not trust their national political institutions are less likely to trust the Church than people who partially or fully trust their government or Parliament. The evidence indicates a somewhat simpler mechanism than the one presented: people that have trust in political institutions also trust the religious ones. Those that are skeptical about politics, adopt similar attitudes towards the Church. As a result, irrespective of the performance of the national political institutions, the Church is not seen as a replacement, it does not provide the substitute for a failure of representation. In this respect, the Church does not benefit from attachment as a result of the negative attitudes towards politics. Instead, at the aggregate level, it successfully tackles two paradoxical trends. On the one hand, it attracts almost all citizens with positive attitudes towards domestic political institutions and on the other hand the respect and trust for the Church is very high despite a decrease of trust in national institutions. Without losing those who keep their faith in the political potential of the representative institutions, the Church maintains a solid core of supporters among the rest of citizens who partially or totally distrust national political actors.

Ever closer Church

The picture drawn by table 3 is somehow similar to what observed for the previous relationship with a minor difference: there are more respondents that did not answer to the question regarding trust in the EU than those that answered to the trust in national political institutions (see N at the end of tables 2 and 3). As a result, we may infer that people are able to evaluate their levels of confidence into the institutions they know better rather than in institutions about which they have marginal and truncated information.

The figures in table 3 indicate that Romanians who trust the EU have a higher tendency to also trust the Church compared with the rest of the citizens. Nine out of 10 Romanians that trust the EU also trust the Church whereas only seven out of 10 people that do not trust the EU vest their confidence in the religious institutions. Moreover, the discrepancy between these two groups constantly increases during the examined period. If in 2002 the difference between supporters of the EU and non-

supporters that trust the Church is of 12%, in 2007 this difference is of 21% with a maximum gap of 23% in 2005. At the same time, both groups register a stabilization of their current percentages starting 2004, the major oscillations being observed before that date.

This trend can be linked with the stability of the trust in the EU registered after 2004 (see table 1). It corresponds to the immediate post-accession period of the other candidate countries and with the final years of the pre-accession period for Romania. In this respect, after observing that their neighbors succeeded in their efforts for accession, the Romanians stabilized their opinions and created a linkage between the support for the international and the religious institutions. However, this process is possible due to the type of support that Romanian citizens attach to the EU. Quite intuitively, citizens in pre-accession periods display diffuse support for the EU, they trust the general structure of the Union, and they set their minds on the basis of the information received through official channels, most of the time at a general level. The specific support comes only after people start understanding how the EU works, what its values are and how they can interfere with national traditions. If the latter would have been expressed, our theoretical reasons indicate that it would have been difficult to register a positive relationship between the trust in the EU and in the Church.

Table 3. Trust in the EU and in Church

Trust in Church?	Trust in the EU?	
	No	Yes
<i>No</i>		
2002	19%	7%
2003	29	12
2004	31	12
2005	32	9
2006	34	17
2007	34	13
<i>Yes</i>		
2002	81%	93%
2003	71	88
2004	69	88
2005	68	91
2006	66	83
2007	66	87
<i>Strength of relationship</i>		
2002	0.15	
2003	0.2	
2004	0.19	
2005	0.27	
2006	0.18	
2007	0.24	

Notes:

- For the frequency table on trust in the EU and in Church, see Table 1
- All relationships are significant at the 0.01 level
- $799 \leq N \leq 863$
- Source CCEBs and EBs, 2002-2007.

The correlation coefficients indicate that all relationships are statistically significant at the 0.01 level and are in the predicted direction. The strength of the relationship increases over the years, ranging from 0.15 in 2002 to 0.24 in 2007 with a peak in 2005 (0.27). In this respect, the relationship between the trust in the EU and in the Church is stronger than the previous examined relationship between national political and religious institutions. The strength increases as the time of accession gets closer, as the EU ceases to be an ideal and becomes a reality for most of the citizens. Given the comparison of percentages and the value of the correlation coefficients, there is empirical support for hypothesis 2.

The results so far indicate that the strongest relationship is between the trust in the EU and in religious institutions, becoming stronger as time passes by. The level of trust in national political institutions and in Church is also positively related indicating that people that trust in the former also vest more trust in the latter when compared with the rest. However, the difference between the groups is much smaller for this relationship than for the one detected for hypothesis 2. Overall, positive attitudes appear to enhance further positive attitudes. Beyond all emphasized mechanisms, Romanians that are confident in the political processes both at national and international level vest trust in the Church more than the others. More than 90% of the citizens supporting the EU trust the Church and almost 95% of those trusting the national political institutions also trust the Church. What matters the most is the difference between this group and the rest of the population and it is small for national political institutions and increasingly higher for the EU. Having these relatively modest results, we conduct a binary logistic regression to observe the explanatory potential of the variables employed by the two hypotheses in predicting the level of trust in the Church in Romania.

An explanatory model

The results of the bivariate analyses suggest the existence of weak relationships for both hypotheses. They also indicate a hierarchy regarding the explanatory potential of the trust in the EU and in national political institutions. In order to provide a supplementary test, we employ a binary logistic regression for one of the six analyzed years. We chose 2007, as it is the most recent year and with high values on the correlation coefficients. The latter make this year the usual suspect to observe a relationship

between the three variables and if this is strong, we will expand it to the entire analyzed period.

The dependent variable for this analysis is represented by trust in the Church. The reference category for trust in the EU and trust in national political institutions is the last category, namely the group of people that display trust in these institutions. The statistical results are displayed in table 4. The Hosmer-Lemeshow *goodness of fit* test (not reported in the table) is significant at the 0.01 level, implying that this is a well-fitting model. Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between observed and model-predicted values of trust in the EU and in national political institutions and thus implying that the model's estimates fit the data at an acceptable level.

The results of the logistic regression analysis confirm the earlier findings of the bivariate analyses. Nagelkerke's R^2 , indicating the amount of variation in the trust for Church explained by trust for the EU and national political institutions, is very small (0.1), showing that this model explains up to 10% of the variation in trust.⁵⁹ This result is quite modest and leaves plenty of room for further explanations about the high level of trust in Church.

Table 4: Binary logistic regression for trust in Church

		B	Exp(B)
Constant		23,618	
Trust national institutions	Medium trust	-1.5**	,23
	Lack of trust	-1.3*	,27
Trust EU	Lack of trust	-1.1**	,33

* Significance at the 0.05 level

** Significance at the 0.01 level

The figures in table 4 fully support the evidence presented in tables 2 and 3. Starting with the trust in national institutions (trust being the reference category), each shift from trust to medium trust decreases (b=-1.3) the odds of trusting the Church by a factor of about 0.23, controlling for other variables in the model. That means that approximately one in five people that give up their trust in one national political institution decides to give up trust in Church. A similar result is registered when looking at those that lack trust in national institutions: when changing their option from trust to distrust, one in five (factor of 0.27) also start distrusting Church. Regarding the trust in the EU, the results are sharper, consistent with the relationships in table 3. Any additional respondent that does not trust the EU decreases (b=-1.1) the odds of trusting the Church by a factor of about 0.33, controlling for other variables in the model. Compared with those that trust the EU, one third of the non-supportive citizens display lack of trust in the Church (fully consistent with what is indicated in table 3. All these results should be seen on the background of

the model's poor explanatory potential of 10% for the high level of trust in the Romanian Church.

Conclusion and discussion

This research attempted to explain the high level of trust in the Romanian Church on the background of a highly stable support for the EU and increasing discontent with the national political institutions. The results indicate that the lack of trust in national institutions and the beneficial impact of the EU on national politics impact only marginally on the level of support for the Church. The model including these two factors explains only 10% of the total variation of trust in Church. However, there are relevant findings at the level of each relationship. Regarding domestic political institutions, the more trust citizens have attached to them, the more they support the Church, leading to the assertion that positive attitudes trigger further optimism and trust in other types of institutions (i.e. religious). More stable and relevant trends are detected when referring to the EU and the Church. Often seen as an alternative to dysfunctional domestic institutions, the EU is seen as beneficial for the country and as Romanians got closer to 2007, the positive relationship between those that vest confidence in it and in the Church strengthens and increases.

There are two major implications of these conclusions for understanding citizens' attitudes in Romania. First, citizens' trust in the Church does not depend on their political perceptions. As the correlation and regression analyses indicate, the explanatory potential of the included variable is quite reduced. The motivations for Romanians to trust the Church are complex and do not match the patterns identified in other empirical settings. What strikes one the most is that religion is not seen as an alternative to political failures generated by often corrupt and seldom-trusted national institutions. At the mass level, those that bear positive perceptions about politics vest more confidence in the Church. Second, variations of support across time appear to be explained more by trust in international organizations rather than domestic ones. With the accession, the former becomes more and more important.

As the raised question remains largely unanswered after the empirical test, further research is necessary. The results of this study indicate that the institutional components are not valid tracks to investigate high levels of trust in the Church. Instead, particularizing the processes may provide fruitful results. Rather than asking about the general trust in the EU, one may include the particular effects caused by the EU as relevant factors to explain the trust in the Church: cultural openness, diminishing traditions, eliminating boundaries, individual vs. community values, etc. Each of these strikingly addresses issues raised by the ROC in its speech and may prove relevant in further investigations. Furthermore, perceptions of

problematic processes at the domestic level may be better particularized: corruption, clientelism, and administrative inefficiency are highly problematic and may involve ties with the Church as an alternative.

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Notes

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¹⁰ Lavinia Stan & Lucian Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-communist Democratization", *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, 8 (2000): 1467-1488. See also Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu: *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Silviu Rogobete, "Morality and Tradition in Post-Communist Orthodox Lands: on the Universality of Human Rights, with Special Reference to Romania", in *Religion, State and Society*, 32, 3 (2004).

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¹⁷ The Church official bitterly criticized the 1991 Constitution for not acknowledging the unique position of the Orthodox Church within the Romanian society and in 1994, the Church declared itself the "National Church;" in 1999, the Church was about to be officially recognized as the "national Church", when Radu Vasile, then premier of Romania, amended the new draft law on religious denominations in favor of the ROC. "Not before the cabinet turned down the proposal, Patriarch Teoctist went on 'strike', and relations between the NPPCD (the political party whom Radu Vasile belonged) and the Church cooled considerably." (Stan & Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-

Communist Democratization”, 1475). Later, in 1997, when the Senate approved the Boila law regarding the resolution of the disputes between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholics, which allowed Greek-Catholics to have their own Church in the localities where they lived, the patriarch “rejected it and the Transylvanian prelates threatened civil war if the Boila bill were passed.” “Costernated” by the vote, Teoctist labelled the decision ‘an inadmissible interference in the national Church’s problems...’ (Ibid.).

¹⁸ Alina Mungiu Pippidi, “The Ruler and The Patriarch: The Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church in Transition”, in *East European Constitutional Review*, (Spring 1998): 86.

¹⁹ Stan & Turcescu, “Politics, National Symbols and the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral,” 1119.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Detleff Polack, “Modifications in the Religious Field of Central and Eastern Europe”, in *European Societies*, 3, 2, (2001): 135 – 165.

²² Liviu Andreescu, “The construction of Orthodox churches in post-communist Romania,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59, 3 (May 2007): 455.

²³ Cheng Chen, “The Roots of Illiberal Nationalism in Romania: A Historical Institutional Analysis of the Leninist Legacy”, *East European Politics and Societies* 17, (2003): 166-201.

²⁴ Geoffrey Pridham, “Assessing Democratic Consolidation in Central & Eastern Europe: The European Dimension”, *Acta Politica*, 41 (2006): 342-369; Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves, “Corruption and Democratization: A Civic Republican View”, *Acta Politica* 41 (2006): 370-388.

²⁵ Ramet, 282.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

²⁷ Responding to the critics who were accusing the Church’s collaborationism with the communist regime and especially Teoctist’s gesture of sending a letter of support to Ceausescu days after the revolution started in Timisoara, The Synod of the Church in 10 January 1990 apologized for those ‘who did not always have the courage of the martyrs’ and expressed regret that it had been ‘necessary to pay the tribute of obligatory and artificial praises addressed to the dictator’ to ensure certain liberties” and the Church leaders constantly repeated that their submission to the communist regime was justified by their desire to avoid “a more dreadful alternative: obliteration.” (Stan & Turcescu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-Communist Democratization”, 1470).

²⁸ Judith Torney-Purta, Carolyn Henry Barber & Wendy Klandl Richardson, “Trust in Government-related Institutions and Political Engagement among Adolescents in Six Countries”, *Acta Politica*, 39 (2004): 380-406.

²⁹ Geoffrey Pridham, “Assessing Democratic Consolidation in Central & Eastern Europe,” 342-369.

³⁰ Peter Gross & Vladimir Tismăneanu, “The End of Postcommunism in Romania,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, 2 (April 2005): 146-147.

³¹ Gross & Tismaneanu, 149.

³² Stan & Turcescu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-communist Democratization”, 1472.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1477.

³⁴ Schopflin, 55-90; Anca Şincan, „The Romanian Orthodox Church, the State, and the European Union. Steps towards integration”, *The Yearbook of the „Gheoghe*

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³⁶ Dobrater, 1998, 6, *apud*. Liviu Andreescu, art.cit., 456.

³⁷ Which, in practice, in countries with a strong, dominant Orthodox Church, means most of the time a call for a privileged relationship between the State and the Church (Andreescu, art.cit. 457).

³⁸ Liviu Andreescu, art.cit., 454, 456.

³⁹ Schopflin, 55-90. See also O. Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme: L’idéologie de l’Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste*, (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1997).

⁴⁰ Radu, 95-103.

⁴¹ For details see Keith Hitchins, *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780-1849* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).; Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).; Silviu Rogobete, art.cit.; Caius Dobrescu, “Conflict and diversity in East European nationalism, on the basis of a Romanian case study”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 17 (2003): 393-414. See also Cheng Chen, art. Cit. and Lucian N. Leustean, “The Political Control of Orthodoxy in the Construction of the Romanian State, 1859-1918”, *European History Quarterly*, 37 (2007): 61-80.

⁴² See Peter Lakatos, “Denominational and cultural models and possible ecumenical strategy from a Romanian context”, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XVIII, 6, (December 1998).

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⁴⁴ Lucian Leustean, art.cit., 61.

⁴⁵ Stan & Lucian, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-communist Democratization”, 1472.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Hefner, *Democratic Civility: The History and Cross-Cultural Possibility of a Modern Political Ideal*, (Transaction Press, 1998), 181.

⁴⁷ Șincai, 210-219.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 211-212.

⁴⁹ M.A. Mac Iver, “Religious politicization among Western European mass publics” in W.H.Swatos, Jr. (ed.), *Religious politics in global and comparative perspective*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Cleveland Fraser, Brent Nelsen, and James Guth, “Does Religion Matter? Christianity and Public Support for the European Union,” *European Union Politics*, 2, 2 (Spring 2001): 191-217.; Brent Nelsen, and James Guth, “Religion and Youth Support for the European Union,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 41, 1 (March 2003): 89-112.; Cleveland Fraser, Brent Nelsen, and James Guth, “Christianity and Public Support for the European Union: A Multivariate Analysis,” Biennial Conference of the European Community Studies Association, 31 May-2 June 2001, Madison, Wisconsin.

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⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵⁴ Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 180.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Pridham, "Assessing Democratic Consolidation in Central & Eastern Europe: The European Dimension", *Acta Politica*, 41 (2006): 362.

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⁵⁷ Geoffrey Pridham, "The Scope and Limitations of Political Conditionality: Romania's Accession to the European Union", *Comparative European Politics* 5 (2007): 347-376.

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⁵⁹ We run two separate models where trust in national political institutions and trust in the EU are single independent variables. Nagelkerke's R for each regression indicates a very low explanatory potential for each of the two, with a slight difference in favor of the trust in the EU variable: 0.06 vs. 0.04.