LUMEN 2014

Bessarabia- the Perennial Political Subject on the Romanian-Soviet Sensible Agenda

Miruna Mădălina Trandafir

“History and International Relations Department, “Petru-Maior” University, Târgu-Mureș, Romania

Abstract

Aligned to the axiomatic premise that the Romanian-Soviet bilateral universe has always been marked by a corollary of sensible political topics, topics that have otherwise been, true points of divergence on the official talks between Romania and its Eastern Neighbor, in the present paper we have undertaken the bold engagement to examine the manner in which the Bessarabia problem, has represented such a sensible topic. In other words, the paper aims within an interdisciplinary research attempt, subsumed to an approach from the perspective of the historic semantics and hermeneutics, to highlight the manner in which the Bessarabia question has represented the true touchstone in the Romanian-Soviet bilateral dialogue, thus constituting one of the major historical difficulties that both states, involved in the process raised towards bilateralism, had to manage and implicitly to regulate in the early 90s. In this respect, our analytical horizon focuses particularly on the issue that regards Bessarabia’s reunification with Romania, an issue that represented in the early 90s the real political challenge of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral dialogue as well as the main point on the Romanian-Soviet divergence map. Meanwhile, beyond the thorough approach regarding the controversial political topic of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral universe, the present research attempt tries to highlight the main causes that have led to the failure of the reunification Odyssey. Thus, in order to reveal the nodal vein of the paper, the present research attempt has a methodology configuration based on a diachronic, interpretive and comparative technique. Integrally, the research paper aims to reveal the manner in which the Bessarabia issue, namely the issue of a disputed territory, has represented since the early 90s, both a problematical political permanency of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral register as well as one of the most dominant, controversial and stringent themes of the Romanian-Soviet/Russian post-communist bilateral agenda.

Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/). Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of LUMEN 2014.

Keywords: the Bessarabia question, political subject, Romanian-Soviet bilateral relation, sensible agenda, reunification

* Corresponding author. Tel.:+40-744-344-072;
E-mail address: miruna_trandafir@yahoo.com
1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, within the pantheon related to the elements that have significantly burdened the evolution of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral relations, Bessarabia and its problematical dimension, has occupied, eminently, a leading place. Basically, the Bessarabia question has always constituted (in the communist period and afterwards) a constant burden on the bilateral agenda of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral relations, but also one of the most difficult and complicated issue consubstantial to the bilateral universe, an issue on which, Romania and the Soviet Union, have acted, within their mechanism of mutual relations, under a genuine ,,dialogue of the deaf". Thus, if during the communist interlude, the Bessarabia problem has figured as the main point of the friction chapter existing between the two states, with the collapse of the socialist regime, the Bessarabia issue has resurfaced, marking decisively and relentlessly, the trajectory of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral relations. In other words, if during the communist period, the Bessarabia issue, has represented the main subject of dispute between the two countries but also one of the major historical difficulties inherent to the bilateral dimension, shortly after the implosion of the communist era, the Bessarabia issue became the real challenge of the Romanian-Soviet bilateral relations and thus the true touchstone of the bilateral dimension.

2. Methodology

Introducing in the scientific debate a topic that can be included in the category of the so-called “immediate history or recent history”, implies presenting those methods and research instruments, specific to this historiographical typology (Abraham F., 2006). We must specify even from the beginning, that such a research – as the one we are proposing – is not and cannot be built on archive documents due to objective reasons. Such is the situations of the diplomatic archives. However, this distinct type of historic research holds other advantages than the ones derived from the knowledge based of archive usage. As an alternative, our research is funded on consulting specialty literature, to which we have impartially attributed on the basis of an interpretative analysis, work hypothesizes, essential to comprehending the debated topic. Secondly, on the basis of a comparative method, we have examined certain studies and documentary materials, juxtaposing them, in order to reveal the validity of the information. Last, but not least, treating the examined issue had requested adopting a diachronic technique, having in view that the studied phenomenon is an evolving one, an extremely important one, generating considerable effects.

3. The 1991 moment-the failure of the reunification

Fundamentally, the Bessarabia issue, namely, the issue of a Romanian territory-occupied in an arbitrarily manner by the Tsarist Russia in 1812, returned to Romania in 1918, occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, freed from the Soviet domination by the Romanian soldiers in 1941 and reoccupied by the Red Army in 1944- and thus, the issue of a territory which has represented, over time, the main point of discord as well as the fundamental point of contention between Romania and the Soviet Union, has been reinstated, slowly but surely, on the Romanian-Soviet bilateral agenda, in the early '90s. At the same time also, it has been increasingly invoked the idea of Romania’s reunification in its natural and legitimate borders, especially since at that time, the essential conditions and assumptions necessary for the completion of a complex historical process which has been brutally interrupted in 1812 and respectively in 1940, have been prefigured in this respect. This fundamental reality, of national reunification, has been seemed to materialize, with evidence, in the early '90, when the configured historical moment granted such a success. Basically, Romania had undoubtedly and peremptory rights regarding Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, namely had undeniable rights regarding the two Romanian provinces which had been reincorporated to the Romanian state in 1918 and later had been alienated from their genuine country, following an ultimatum exercised by the Soviet occupier under the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In addition, given the fact that Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact signed on august 23, 1939, was considered to be non-compliant with the norms and usages of international law, being qualified in this respect, as null and void, but also taking into consideration the aspect according to which Romania had to conform to a situation that has been sanctioned under
an act falling under force, an consequently, from this point of view, the document was void, the Romanian state, was fully entitled to benefit from the reestablishment of the historical justice (Severin A., 1995).

At the same time it is not less relevant the fact that the new political climate prefigured in the early '90s, seemed to provide favorable conditions for the reunification of the Romanian state. Basically, the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev’s political leadership focused its entire strategic and tactic arsenal with the express purpose to preserve the halo of grand power as well as to face the challenges which aroused from the perpetual emulation state with the forces of the western democracies. Surely that, in order for the Soviet Union to have maximum gain of success in this respect, it was imperative for the great soviet conglomerate to show the availability required in favor of a policy at least concessive. This policy of concessions, indispensable at that time for the mere existence of the Soviet Union, had to subscribe to a logical and natural reasoning: the necessity to recourse to a series of sacrifices, both in the dimension of the arms race as well as in terms of territorial annexations (Severin A., 1995). Therefore, in 1990, the Soviet Union was willing to agree to a policy much more tolerant and permissive, venturing into a series of actions aimed, on the one hand, at withdrawing the soviet troops from Afghanistan as well as from the space of the communist Europe, and on the other hand, at recognizing the independence of the three Baltic states which have been incorporated in an arbitrarily manner under the provisions the Nazi-Soviet pact (Severin A., 1995). Basically, the recognition of the independence of the three Baltic states, whose fate was similar to the fate of Bessarabia, represented a more than probative evidence that in that sensible and complex manner, there was a potential chance of success, and thus, a hypothetical Soviet availability for dialogue on the issues of territorial invoice. In addition, given the fact that the status of the three Baltic states has been directly influenced by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact provisions, provisions in regards to which Bessarabia was no exception, the new political situation foreshadowed, assumed applying the same corrective mechanism also in regards to the ancient Romanian territory. In other words, in the context in which the Soviet Union granted full endorsement to the independence of the three Baltic states, Bessarabia had the opportunity to gain its own independence and thus, had the chance to embark on the road to its unification with Romania.

Finally and no less significant is the fact that the philosophy of the reform policies instituted at Kremlin’s highest political echelon din not leave indifferent Moldova, the reverberations generated by the policies of „glasnost” and „perestroika” causing a frantically echo in the heart of the ancient Romanian territory. Basically, on the background of this current reform instituted under Gorbachev’s sign, it has increased, with power, since 1989, the sense of belonging to another cultural space and the national revival phenomenon has gained considerable meanings in such a manner that it can be said undoubtedly that 1989, represented for Moldavia, the year of awareness to the feeling of belonging to the Romanian people.

How did Romania react given that there were potential opportunities to achieve the unionist project as well as the reunification of the two Romanian states? How did the Romanian state perceive the opportunity given related to the reunification policy?

Paradoxically and at least strange, Romania, through the voice of its legitimate and legal political elite, hasn’t been aware of this unprecedented opportunity that it has been afforded, of achieving the historical dream related to the unification of the Romanian people and hasn’t acted vigorously, thus missing the meeting with the history regarding the Moldavia issue. Basically, in the context in which the objective of Romania’s reunification with Moldavia seemed a naturally and feasible objective, the Romanian state, through its governing elite, preferred to establish and articulate the main points of action regarding this pending matter, on the basis of an hesitant position, and thus, under the policy of small steps.

From this point of view, at least questionable appears to be first of all, Romania’s political elite decision to recognize Bessarabia’s statehood, a decision perceived to be an erroneous strategic move that basically demonstrated the reality in accordance to which the Romanian state had absolutely no claims on Moldavia. Basically, becoming the first state that officially recognized the independence of the young state, Romania, through the voice of its ruling elite, accepted to give up to its natural rights on the lost territories and diminished visible its chances to recover Bessarabia. (Andreescu G., Stan V., Weber R., 1994).

And so, if through the act of recognizing Moldavia’s independence it can be considered that it had been lost the first concrete and palpable opportunity towards the reunification process, it is also true that neither the project related to the theory of existing the two Romanian states, based on the principle of self-determination,
conceptualized by the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs with the unanimous consent of the presidential administration, did not realize to much in this respect. Basically, this policy which subsumed to an algorithm that aimed on the one hand, to the gradual blurring of differences and thus, to the disappearance of the borders between the two Romanian states, and on the other hand, aimed, at increasing the region’s autonomy, proved to be in the shortest possible time, the concrete expression of a new attempt doomed to failure in regards to the reunification process. Complementary, it must be specified also the fact that in the argumentation supporting this theory which certified the existence of two Romanian states, its main artisans invoked the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, arguing thus in favor of a strategy that subscribed in the trend of the European geometry, of unrevised peace treaties and of intangibility of frontiers. Besides, the strategic formula articulated at the level of the official duet formed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency, was a formula that aimed mainly not to abdicate from the provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty from 1947, implicitly not to abjure from the principles of a document of international law that already established Romania’s Easter borders. In addition, beyond the juridical arguments, there was another set of reasons and motivations for whom the main protagonists of the theory of the existence of the two Romanian states considered that this gradual construction based on the self-determination arithmetic as well as on the German paradigm geometry was considered to be, the only viable model, feasible and pragmatic at that time, a model that had to take into consideration the problem of Moldavia. Succinct and concrete, these judgments were based on the following assumptions:

1. in Bessarabia existed to many people that had other ethnicity than the Romanian, one and therefore, in such circumstances and conditions, the eventual unification would provoke new problems for the Romanian state;

2. since Moldavia- lost through a treacherous action of administrative reorganization performed within the Soviet Union by Nikita Khrushchev in 1958- a few counties from the South as well as some counties from the North, in favor of Ukraine, it was time to recover those territories by the personal action of the authorities in Chişinău and only afterwards to arise the reunification problem (otherwise those territories would have been completely lost, thus forever wasting the opportunity to lift up their problem);

3. the settlement of the Bessarabia issue could be realized only in the context when between Romania and the Soviet Union existed a climate of cooperation and mutual understanding;

4. if Romania had requested Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina- in the case of the latter invoking the fact that there the Romanian people had become a minority- than Hungary could have asked for, and even obtain, the restitution of Transylvania (Severin A., 1995). Actually, this last aspect, namely the fear of arousing the Transylvania problem, represented the main reason for which the protagonists of the concept of existing two Romanian states in Europe, have expressed from the very beginning their reluctance in regards to the reunification process, preferring instead to venture within a prudent policy, without territorial claims.

Consequently if it is widely recognized the aspect according to which the theory of the existence of two Romanian states represented, in effect the political project which has permanently stopped any hope in favor for the unification, contributing undoubtedly through its register of effects and implication to the second moment of failure in regards to the reunification process, it is equally true that the reunification policy hasn’t been able to materialize in its palpable dimension due to the fact that at the level of the Romanian authorities it hasn’t existed a cohesion regarding the project of national reunification. Basically, at the level of the Romanian authorities, it existed from the very beginning two completely opposing views regarding the national reunification program. On the one hand, it prevailed the vision specific to the Government, which was one eminently pro-unionist, the majority of the members of Romania’s executive power focusing to make constant efforts in order to achieve this national goal, and on the other hand, it prevailed the vision specific to the decisonal duet (Minister of Foreign Affairs-Presidency), a vision subsumed to the dialectics of the existence of two Romanian states within Europe.

However, beyond this lack of cohesion that prevailed at the level of Romania’s main decisional factors, a lack of cohesion on whose behalf a new opportunity for the unification has been missed, the project of national reunification hasn’t been realized also due to the fact that the idea of the reunification with Moldova, hasn’t been perceived by the Romanian state as a highly priority. For Romania, who has been recent freed from the Soviet Union’s spheres of attraction, the supreme objective of foreign policy was the one that insisted for the integration in the NATO and the European Union, thus gaining priority over the objective of reunification.

At the same time it is not less significant that the program of national reunification failed also due to the deteriorated image that Romania achieved in its external dimension in the context of some excesses of violence
which erupted during the riot of the miners as well as during the Târgu-Mureș events. In addition, the chances for the unification process have been severely compromised due to the fact that the main Romanian decision makers engaged themselves in internal disputes and sterile polemics, instead of understanding that beyond the conflicts prevailed a national interest: the union of Bessarabia with Romania (Constantiniu F., 2012). Complementary, the approach to unify the two Romanian states, has been obstructed in a considerable manner, because there had not been a pressure on the political factor in order to force the reunification process. However, beyond this factors that played an important role, the process of the national unification has been severely compromised mainly due to the presence in Moldavia of the 14th Russian Army and because of the conflict of Transnistria, in other words the process of national reunification has been seriously compromised especially because of Russia’s strong offensive in the region and implicitly because of a conflict that erupted on a territory that has never been Romanian but where the majority of people (Russians and Ukrainians) expressed deliberately their reluctance in regards to the unification process through a secession action that has ceased definitively any strategy for the unification of the two states (Papakostas, N. I., 2009).

4. Conclusions

Consequently, summarizing the main ideas of these observant assessments, one can say with conviction that the national reunification epic and implicitly the unification odyssey has been severely compromised by a wide range of factors, factors that have otherwise been marked by a Romanian specific color. Paradoxically, the Romanian state by its uncertain and cautious conduct, has contributed in a substantial manner, to the compromise of the unification process, thus missing from the lesson of its meeting with history in this regard.

5. References


