

THE MISSING LINK IN THE ROMANIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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The historical and geopolitical context of the past years- mainly portrayed by the arcs of crisis at the Eurasian border and in the Middle East, as part of the process of transition to a new global security order- caused the Romanian-American relations to enter a new phase which bears major strategic implications and opportunities.

From being the latest arrival in the NATO club, Romania eventually turned into an esteemed partner of both the Alliance and the US, when it comes to military and security coordinates. In terms of security challenges, Romania is also subject, by virtue of US political backing, to an intense process shifting from a kleptocratic and bogus rule of law regime to a new stage that might lay the foundations of a modern democratic society. However, when it comes to the political, cultural and economic level (except for the security domain) any replica of the Truman Doctrine or of the Marshall Plan, which served the EU's hard core half century ago, did not occur in Romania.

The arising conundrum is whether this state of affairs is likely to bolster Romania's evolution and ensure long term security of the southeastern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance along with a strong, lasting relation with its strategic ally, which is the US. In absence of economic prowess and a salient political relation with the US, would a buildup of strategic and security relevance along with the fight against corruption be sufficient and sustainable means in Romania's democratic and economic becoming, in the context of its strategic alliances?

There are certain similarities between Romania and the US in terms of history (both countries are young in terms of statehood), culture and in light of some genuine economic opportunities which can serve as a cornerstone for a strong partnership between the two countries. Indeed, there are strong analogies even with the history of the US if we take, for example, the resemblance between the current fight against corruption in Romania and the J.E Hoover era or the RICO investigations, the decline in quality of the Romanian media after the *breaking news* model in America during the 80's or the recent IT revolution in Romania, almost a replica of the Silicon Valley revolution at the beginning of the millennium. Both good and bad...

Then what are the reasons for this present unilateralism in US-Romanian relations that prevented the development of broader economic and political ties?

Firstly, what is to be taken into consideration is the geopolitical “cool down” of the US focus towards Central and East Europe after the end of the Cold War and up until the Ukrainian Crisis.

Secondly, another striking reason would be the vacillating political and economic itinerary Romania undertook over the last two decades. Economically speaking, Romania was lured (in line with its inter-war period tradition) by the nationalist (and this time also communist) fairytale, fueled by certain local political circles, advocating the bolstering of the Romanian capital in the economy (mainly in the strategic sectors), to the detriment of multinational capitalism, using as *front men* individuals from “remote or discreet layers of society” instead of individuals forged in genuine economic competition processes. The result was a self-destructive society, based on corruption, political and economic obscurantism, as opposed to the rule of law and economic globalization. The economic failure of such projects, the recent judicial sentences in the files involving Romanian “capitalists” or associated “politicians”, which prevailed in the politic and economic life of the past two decades, are enough to prove the incongruity between this way of making business and the democratic evolution.

What was simply not understood was that the Romanian “capitalists”, despite all political and institutional support granted, never had the necessary capacities and skills required in the competition with liberal economies. This was even confirmed by the Romanian “cardboard capitalists” which, although using every chance to boast their messianic mission towards Romania’s economic safeguarding, once reaching economic maturity realized they can no longer survive in a genuine competitive environment other than by resorting to foreign expertise, skills and capacities (audit companies, investment banks, managers etc.). Moreover, their descendants were and are, without exception, sent to study abroad to build themselves a better tomorrow.

Nevertheless, it was expected that a “Romanian capitalist” (with a more or less controllable past or future) would easier resonate with the political commandments, often disguised behind austere formulas such as “national security” or “national interest” , as such were coined by some individuals instead of democratic institutions. It has been long forgotten that, historically, the Romanian state wasn’t the best business manager or that it did not have the financial and human capacity to be competitive. The outcome was the ransacking of the

Romanian state and implicitly, of its citizens and the reluctance of major foreign investors to engage in large scale projects in Romania. At the same time, the failure of certain strategic privatizations or major infrastructure projects involving foreign investors enabled a continued fuelling of the radical rhetoric of Romanian economic nationalism.

Romania distanced itself from the axiology and economic patterns of well developed economies. The advocates of the “Romanian economic nationalism”- in fact, cynical promoters of group interests- would definitely claim that the role of a strong domestic capitalism is to counteract foreign investors supported by their governments in penetrating the Romanian market, turning Romania into their “colony”. It would actually be nice to see Romanian ambassadors overcoming the phase of dealing with the Romanian cross border crime crisis and to start backing in exchange the interests of Romanian companies in their countries of residence, same as some highly disputed foreign embassies do in Bucharest when their business undertakings are facing unlawful practices (unfortunately, Romania still hasn’t propelled Romanian enterprises to a cross border economic level - behold another measure of Romania’s political capacity to support genuine economy). If in the USA the liberal economic model does not preclude the role of the government but places it in the cooperative framework of the *checks and balances* system in which the government must wisely act as a regulator, in Romania so far, the mix of state affairs and domestic capital based on non-economic hierarchies and criteria was always the favorite, although proving to be bankrupted. What has also been disregarded is that this western economic model can be improved and needs time and determination to operate efficiently.

The advocates of the “Romanian economic nationalism” have even come to support some economic and political models different from the ones undertaken by Romania and which are used in liberal economies, all in the name of “economic/energy independence” etc, overlooking the actual geopolitical stature of Romania and the historic globalization process which, willy-nilly, will not allow this country to leave the orbit of major economic powers.

The true capacity and the pace in the development of the Romanian capitalism have only been highlighted after Romania’s accession to the EU, once with the boom of Romanian, politically unrelated, start-ups , several of them enjoying a domestic and even international triumph.

The decay of the façade capitalism formed over the past two decades, due to the global crisis, the lack of competitiveness and, recently, to the fight against corruption, is likely to redirect

the frustrations of this bunch of opportunist groups further into the area of politics as a new attempt to design rent generation schemes.

The potential re-positioning-at first subtle and gradually, more vocal and applied-of certain circles in Bucharest on the coordinates of archaic or caste nationalist economic policies are likely to represent a genuine challenge for Romania's strategic relations with the US, subject also to the local and geopolitical context. Furthermore, the contagious intensive foreign propaganda in favor of certain economic and social patterns and models that are different from the "bankrupt capitalism" might trigger some strategic repositioning processes in Romania, particularly when one must consider a Romanian population prone to emotional rather than rational impetus. The prevalence of anti-western and anti-American political statements corroborated with the promotion of practices, laws or institutions intended to aggrandize pressure on the free business environment, can be taken as early symptoms of such a process.

What is to be understood by Bucharest? That a competitive and wealth producing economy does not imply an unconditioned and protectionist dominance of domestic capital. Even if, we would be "occupied" by multinational corporations, this would present itself as an opportunity for national entrepreneurs, which would convey the expertise gathered from these corporations to the real economy; not for "national security" or "financial nationalism" reasons but for the benefit of their employees and their sub-contractors' welfare and for large "army" of beneficiaries of the tax money. It will rest for the mechanisms of the Romanian system of rule of law to separate the entrepreneurs who bring added value from those who plunder.

Secondly, what must be understood is that the fight against corruption is insufficient for Romania to develop its democracy and economy on a long term basis. Romania must improve its democratic administration and facilitate economic development, and not to protect the economic development of some players in a discriminatory and uncompetitive manner, by a vigorous regulatory capacity in order to support individuals and their freedom, skills and welfare and by ruling out undertakings that are incapable of self-survival. The very first step required in this demarche is an in-depth and urgent reform of the Romanian political and administrative system.

What is to be understood by Washington D.C.? The security branch of the bilateral relation with Romania is not sufficient for the emergence of a strong ally on NATO's southern flank.

In absence of governmental programs to promote effective economic and commercial relations between the two states and to boost investments along with the exchange of “economical and administrative intelligence”, investment opportunities cannot be further developed. A stunted US economic presence in Romania could pave the way for economic nationalism (in a primitive form), already present in a latent form. This will further aggravate political vulnerabilities or may even trigger strategic repositioning. The insufficient support for turning Romania into a bridgehead with a perspective towards the Silk Road could also represent a lost historical opportunity, which nevertheless, other regional players will try to exploit. It is therefore fundamental for the EU, the US and Romania, to avoid Romania turning into a strategic issue rather than a strategic partner.