

Rethinking Cultural Relations between the European Union and United States in Age of the Transatlantic Rift

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Abstract: In the present article I intend to raise the issue of the relevance of religion and religiosity in the light of the transatlantic drift and of the cultural integration in the UE. The reawakening of religiousness, either Christian or Islamic demonstrates the appearance of a new cultural map of Western world, due to the consequences of globalization, cultural relativism, present-day economic crisis, military or terrorist threats. Underlining the politicization of religion and its different traits in the US and the UE, not forgetting about Romanian post-communist religiosity, the article attempts to define the degree according to which religion in the twenty-first century might affect and possibly change Western modernity.

Keywords: religion, religiosity, America, Europe, modernity

The question whether religion will enhance European integration or hinder it, or if, on larger plane, religion will act as a major factor in EU-US relations determining the rapprochement between the two former components of the Western world, or aggravate the crisis between them, is held in the views of many present-day authors as a major cultural preoccupation. Growing aware of the radical transformations in religiosity in both US and UE, as well as in Eastern European countries, scholars and analysts consider that religion has started to play a sensitive role in public matters. True enough, the legacy of the relations between religion and society in America, on one hand, and between the State and Church in Europe especially, is definitely rich and complex. The secularization process, which was confounded for long with the so-called “death of religion”, contained the seeds, so to say, of discontent with modernity and sooner than it was expected, religiosity began to manifest itself as a powerful contender of ideology in the postwar world. Religion has never ceased to be an important vector of social cohesion in the United States, so that the popularity of the religious discourse in the Cold War period did not come unexpectedly, out of the blue sky. Religious attitudes in Europe at the end to the last century may have been determined by a series of causes, globalization, consumerism, cultural relativism, though it is not obvious whether one of these phenomena or their juxtaposition with internal elements created favorable conditions for the renaissance of religion, especially in Eastern Europe. The constant slackening of public authority and the undermining of trust in state institutions accentuated the existential anxiety of postmodern citizens, making their identities shallow and vulnerable. The political overtones of ethnically focused attitudes manifested by younger generations of either Christian or Islamic faiths could not be overlooked any longer after September 2001.

The economic worsening conditions of the recent past years have determined people on both shores of the Atlantic and inside the enlarged EU to be more perceptive of the redeeming content of the religious discourse. The intensity of religious sensibilities, sparking civilizational fears, was caused by massive waves of immigration in the EU, proving the existence of deep seated connections between religion and culture. In Western Europe, immigrants were exposed to a gamut of inhospitable attitudes ranging from xenophobia to outspokenly racist attitudes. Religiosity in Eastern European countries may have thwarted the course of cultural integration, rekindling the flame of nationalism, delaying the process of achieving a necessarily cohesive European identity. “Rethinking” cultural relations under the circumstances, implies a necessary reevaluation of the national and international frame in which religion and cultural relations are defined, before Euro-skepticism hardens into institutional forms. American exceptionalism and European patriotism seen as the two opposing factors fuelling the disunion in the Western hemisphere appear particularly prone to be influenced by renascent religiosity. American exceptionalism and European patriotism, though not comparable in their historical development, have struck deep roots not only in the diverging political attitudes of the past, but also in the general understanding of the role of religion in modernity.

The passing from the post-Cold War American leadership to a yet uncharted global role of Europe raises many unyielding issues. Will religion reemerge in the 21st century as an appeasing factor of the political and economic crisis? How will the language of this moderation sound like in current politics? Will religion in the frame of culture supply the necessary concrete steps for stopping the ongoing drift between the US and the EU, or will it accelerate it? Might the analysis of the new role of religion dissipate the ambiguity of the future of the transatlantic world? Such questions remain open. In the frame of this article, I consider that the “rethinking” of the role of religion in connection to culture depends on a deeper and more coherent interpretation of modernity, culture and also of the concept of the paradigm. The latter has proved crucial in understanding the specificity of the Western world, in demarcating the particular conditions of European enlargement and integration, as well as in describing intellectuals and/or experts as primary sources of mirroring reality reflexively. In the following, I shall briefly point to some of the many definitions given to modernity, culture and of the notion of the paradigm, which may circumscribe more comprehensively the content of what is meant by “rethinking”.

The distinct cultural consequences of the Enlightenment, or rather the cultural differences between Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment in Europe and America gave birth to contradictory versions of modernity. According to S.N. Eisenstadt’s theory of “multiple modernities”, the history of modernity is a “multiplicity of cultural programs” which determined various social movements and as

well as of different views leading to the weakening of the state-nation, simultaneously to the appearance of new autonomous cultural, political and administrative spaces. A special attention is given by Eisenstadt in this context to “modern Jacobinism”, a notion combining strong anti-modern and anti-Enlightenment elements. Modern Jacobinism, considers Eisenstadt, paved the way towards neo-totalitarianism, by relying on cultural and political impetuous drives of transforming society in a “new order”.¹ It is worth reminding in this sense, that in the first part of the last century, in the United States, the so-called “Christian Atlanticism” was very influential, showing that Atlanticism as a doctrine and as a state of mind was not born at the end of WW II. In the vision of Christian Atlanticism, America and Europe had been locked in a strong entity forming the shield of Western civilization. America and Europe had been perceived as the heirs of the same religious community, defending it from the perils of expanding totalitarianism and nationalism. The concept of the “free world” was thus coined in accordance with the vision of the Western world acting against the “pagan” dangers emerging from Europe. In this sense, America was regarded during the whole period of the 20th century as a conservative force, the only able to continue the Christian heritage and to demarcate it from the antimodern ideologies of fascism, nazism and communism.²

A second necessary step regards the choice of the most adequate definition given to culture as to fit the complex situation of the transatlantic disrapture and especially regarding the antithetical relationship between anti-Americanism and European patriotism. I chose to refer in this context to German historian Reinhart Koselleck’s definition which claims that culture cannot be imagined as a pre-established form which must be carried out into practice, but it should be figured out as the state of a continuous process due to its reflexivity.³ Culture should not take a political uniform, upheld Koselleck, reminding what had occurred in the totalitarian period. Therefore, one should expect that decisionist policies imposed without considering the cultural and religious context might trigger overwhelming reactions from different sectors of European or American societies. Thirdly, regarding the notion of the paradigm, I think that Giorgio Agamben’s definition may suit better than other definitions the complexity of the cultural transatlantic relations in a critical moment, beyond the cultural fractures separating the Eastern and the Western part of the continent.

“A paradigm is a form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but analogical. It moves from singularity to singularity. 2. By neutralizing the

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- 1 S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities” *Daedalus*, Winter 2000, 129, pp. 16-19.
 - 2 Emiliano Alessandri, “The Atlantic Community as Christendom. Some Reflections on Christian Atlanticism in America, circa 1900-1950” in Mariano Marco, (ed.) *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 47-48.
 - 3 Reinhart Koselleck, *Conceptele și istoriile lor. Semnifica și pragmatica limbajului social-politic*. București: Art, 2009, p. 98.

dichotomy between the general and the particular, it replaces a dichotomous logic with a bipolar analogical model. 3. The paradigmatic case becomes such by suspending and, at the same time, exposing its belonging to the group, so that it is never possible to separate its exemplarity from its singularity. 4. The paradigmatic group is never presupposed by the paradigms; rather, it is immanent in them. 5. In the paradigm, there is no origin or *archei* every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic. 6. The historicity of the paradigm lies neither in diachrony nor in synchrony but in a crossing of the two”.⁴

Seeking for more interpretations in the present-day content of modernity, culture and of the notion of the paradigm, one may explain the interconditioning relation existing between the construction of anti-Americanism and of European patriotism. Whether in the past, between intellectuals’ perceptions and the common people’s opinions there was space of neutrality, after the Iraq war, anti-Americanism has augmented in popularity and European patriotism has strengthened as a cultural and political response to American power. European patriotism has turned to be a relatively recent asset pointing to the success of the European construction and to its consequential awareness that cultural and political views as being opposed to the ones expressed by Americans in the same period. European patriotism should not be confused with the revival of Eurocentrism, as it should not be viewed as an emotional lever in the hands of a circle of bureaucrats and European party leaders. European patriotism succeeded in drawing a clear limit separating itself from the totalitarian period of Europe, or from the specter of European exceptionalism triggered by the supremacy of certain state nations in the history of Europe. European patriotism has been fostered by the blooming awareness of the value of Europeaness after the collapse of communism. On the other hand, European patriotism could not have emerged without the permanent competition and, let’s face it, comparison with American exceptionalism. European patriotism stands out nowadays as one of the challenging values of European cultural integration.

Not being an ideology, or a simple perception of the US foreign policy, anti-Americanism was called by Tony Judd as “the major narrative” of our century⁵, a definition which complies both with the postmodern content of the term narrative and the changing conditions of the cultural paradigm. Actually, in the case of Europe’s recent anti-Americanism, Europeans displayed a larger amount of opposing attitudes to the US than in the whole past of the European-American relations. Anti-Americanism is undoubtedly a strong element deepening the course of the transatlantic estrangement. In the already classic example of France, altera-

4 Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, New York: Zone Books, 2009, p. 15.

5 Tony Judd, “A New Master Narrative? Reflections on Contemporary Anti-Americanism” in Tony Judd and Denis Lacorne, (eds.), *With Us or Against US. Studies in Global Anti-Americanism*, London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005, pp. 11-12

tions of perceptions upon America occurred in a course of two centuries from Tocqueville to Baudrillard, from Crèvecoeur to Georges Duhamel or from Paul Valéry to Emanuel Todd. The fluctuation of America's perceptions may be well under the spell of the media, of resentments against American cultural imperialism, but besides fear, rejection or sheer anger, the solid cement of the deficient and disturbing experiences with America has hardened even more, not only in France. Yet, Eastern Europeans, as known, still look up to an America shrouded in the ideals of virtuous democracy, an imperial America though, dividing the world into allies and enemies.

If one seeks for a trenchant representation of the antithetical relations between the US and the EU, there is probably no better illustration than Robert Kagan's essay *Of Paradise and Power*. The vehemence of Kagan's anti-European arguments shows the political decisionist inclination of American conservatism underpinned the call for religious morality, which at its turn expressed the anxiety of losing political supremacy.⁶ Linking "strategic culture" and political action, Robert Kagan coated in the neoconservative vocabulary the cultural dissensions existing in the Western world, without solving them. The appearance of anti-Europeanism in the United States, which is far from breathing the same enthusiasm as of anti-Americanism in Europe, may however show a change in the mindset of Americans who have always admired Europe as the paragon of culture and sophistication. But in spite of this uneven balance, thinks Timothy Garton Ash, the series of loud or hushed reciprocal incriminations point to two cultural modes not only divergent, but also definitely opposed.⁷

But however ominous the actual portraying of the Western world may appear, the reality of the transatlantic crisis is enframed into two types of discourses. The first type focuses on the final split between the two entities of the Western world. The second attenuates the discrepancies to the level of a struggle for representation waged by the members of the same family, thus minimizing the possible future damages. For Aldo Morelli and Peter Baldwin the two poles of the West are relying on each other more than anyone could deem, according to their profound similarities founded of the legacy of religion, democracy, state of law. Without losing from sight that America has been under the criticism of Europeans since its beginnings⁸, it is understandable why Europeans do not think that their future hinges on the American version of modernity, even if they realize their autonomy without military might is utopian. Geir Lundestad considered that though the current trans-

6 Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power. America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York: Random House, 2004, pp. 3-12.

7 Timothy Garton Ash, *Lumea libera. America, Europa si viitorul surprinzator al Occidentului*. Bucuresti: Incitatus, 2005, pp. 126-133.

8 Peter Baldwin, *The Narcissism of Minor Differences. How America and Europe Are Alike*, London: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 7.

atlantic crisis is but one of the many, the drifting powers, US and EU show nowadays a more determined attitude to carry out their divergences onto the way of no return.⁹ The cultural climate between the US and countries in the EU changed considerably after 2000 according to Lunestad, who thought that Europeans had adopted more critical views on American culture. Cultural differences between the US and the EU have witnessed the growing of the distance between the two components of the once apparently united West.¹⁰ Rob Kroes, a reputed Americanist, considered that in the first decade of a new millennium, Europeans and Americans are certainly more divided than bonded by culture, though the answer is not a simple one, due to cultural hybridity and globalization. Nevertheless, it is evident, that religion and religiosity in America and Europe may create contradictory and even opposed interpretations to the concept of “culture” in its current perceptions.¹¹

Whereas American exceptionalism has been inspired by a pugnacious religious spirit, European patriotism appears to dwell on an intellectual construction, namely on an ethic cosmopolitanism, aiming at a peaceful, rational course of negotiating conflicts. It is clear from this perspective that Americans will entertain a nostalgic superiority, counting on their formidable military force, while Europeans will continue to negotiate to acquire the status of equal partners. The ongoing process of perfecting the enlargement of EU favors the rise of Europe as a more and more independent pole of the West, challenging the 20th century aura of the US. Yet, the main hindrance standing against of this historical achievement which is still not finished, lies not so much outside Europe, but inside the continent in the current difficulties met with in the enlargement process in Eastern and Southern Eastern Europe. If everyone agrees on the existence of Europe’s immense cultural heterogeneity, only a few authors dare looking into the problematic aspects of this legacy, foreseeing how European political and cultural traditions will peacefully harmonize themselves beyond the frame of national(ist) experiences.¹² The cultural diversity of Europeans to which one should add the migrationist waves appears as an ever changing horizon hiding areas of ethnic and religious conflicts. It is true that the motto of the EU since 2000 has been “unity in diversity”, but European diversity was not understood and stated until recently as a diversity of equal members. In the past the diversity of Europeans was achieved by exclusion

9 Geir, Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945*, London: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 284-291.

10 Geir Lundestad, “Conclusion: the United States and Europe: Just Another Crisis?” in Geir Lundestad (ed.), *Just Another Major Crisis? The United States and Europe Since 2000*, London: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 304.

11 Rob Kroes, “Worlds Apart? The United States, Europe, and the Cultural Ties that Bind Them”, in Geir Lundestad, (ed.), *Just Another Major Crisis? The United States and Europe Since 2000*, London: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 226-227.

12 Stanley Hoffmann, *Sisiful european. Studii despre Europa, 1964-1994*, București, Curtea Veche, 2003, pp. 50-60.

and / or subjection, depending on the rules of *Machtpolitik*. Compared with the 1960s situation, when religion was deemed as having ended its mission, nowadays the new waves of religiosity may determine the color of politics in adverse and probably rival nuances. Standing against ideologization, consumerism and consequences of the technocratic revolution, the religious revival stems in the conflicting area between political strategies of governance and man's seeking for authenticity.

Under the pen of Tocqueville, religion in America was deemed to pave the road to political freedom, moderating and counterpoising the acquisitive and depersonalizing features of capitalism. Tocqueville thought that religion would eventually compensate the uniformization produced by equality of individuals in "democratic times" and ward off the abuses of liberalism and rugged individualism. Naturally, Tocqueville's 19th century civilizational theory regarding the role of religion in democracy calls for a whole critical reconsideration. Yet, the absence of the moral cement in building an equal civil society has been remarked upon by almost all cultural critics in the last century. It was not surprising that in the name of a grandiose reformist project of Western Europe after WWII, religion was again pivotal in the construction of political project, which envisaged the new blossoming of European civilization. The 20th century history of European Catholicism was essential for the beginnings of the European unification, though later, in the course of the European enlargement process the Catholic factor was forgotten, because of new pressing political and economic issues. At the same time, Protestantism appeared for some authors as being one of the causes for the spreading of Euro-skepticism. In this respect, one can affirm that nowadays, Europe and the United States are less bonded by their common religion, than in the past.¹³ Though, the two great entities of the Western world differ in many respects concerning their Church-state relations, religiosity and the number of religious denomination, the existing differences should not however be overestimated.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there is no denial that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have had as major consequence the politicization of religion not only in the US but also in Western European countries. Scholars agree that religion is far more dynamic in the United States than in Europe, according to the competing religious denominations and to the absence of a national authority or monopoly over the public expression of religious faith. On the contrary, the existence of a strong religious institutional hierarchy in Europe, seen either in its being separated from the state or in its being intricately interwoven with the state as in Eastern Europe, contributed to a more passive religious behavior. In many cases in Europe, religious affiliation coincides with public required civic virtues, which triggers unwanted consequences on level of the public discourse and also on

13 Mathias Bös and Kai Hebel, "Religion" in Alberto Martinelli, (ed.), *The Transatlantic Divide. Comparing American and European Society*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 198.

14 *Ibid.* p. 208.

how the religious minorities are treated.¹⁵ In the United States, Christian religion knew cycles of awakenings, as in the case of evangelicalism, but it also witnessed commercial or cultic experiments as in the case of the Church of Scientology. It is noteworthy mentioning that in the religious awakening elites influence masses in the first phase, but afterwards masses influence elites, which may restructure religious elites, and further on to prevent or accelerate political changes.¹⁶ Another consequential phenomenon is the widespread interest for “spirituality” which speaks for the Europeans’ and Americans’ tendency to embrace religious syncretism and disengage from traditional religious life.¹⁷ In spite of the counter effect religious syncretism especially in higher educated strata of society, religion may instrumentalize important political attitudes in Europe and the United States, reasserting its role as political and civilizational factor.¹⁸

In the case of Romania, which is definitely not an exception to the wave of changes brought by de-secularization, relations between religion and politics are quite transparent, showing the characteristics of Eastern Christianity and of the tradition of the Byzantine concept of the *sinfonia*, underscoring the overt alliance between the state and the church. The case of Greek-Catholic Church forbidden by law and condemned to oblivion during the communist regime, reborn after 1990, stands for an enlightening example of the lack of freedom of religious faith in totalitarianism and of the bitter struggle inside the institution of Romanian national Church. The religious Orthodox tradition may be described as conservative and there is no wonder why it has hindered modernization in Romania, under the pretext of losing national identity. Both Romanian traditional Churches, the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic ones, contributed to the actual making of the national identity, yet the Orthodox Church distinguished itself by a more rigid, anti-modern attitude, often expressing loudly resistance to Western values. The myth of Romanian “exceptionalism” was particularly supported by the Orthodox Church, which saw its mission of defending Romanians from alienating influences coming especially from the West rather than from the East. Such an attitude was clearly voiced in the years of the communist regime, when the high clergy of Romanian Orthodox Church did not officially oppose the abusages of the communist regime as in comparison with the Greek Catholic high hierarchy. The narrative of Romanian

15 Steven Pfaff, 2008, “The Religious Divide: Why Religion Seems to Be Thriving in the United States and Waning in Europe” in Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo (eds.), *Growing Apart? America and Europe in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 24-28.

16 Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late-Twentieth-century Awakening*, London: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 228-229.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-12.

18 Jeffrey Haynes, “Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa” in Jeffrey Haynes, (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 2-7.

exceptionalism was especially valued by the communist dictatorial regime, which found in it a resourceful framework to sustain the figure of the national communist unique leader.

From this perspective, the merging of the political discourse and the religious one was highly consequential for Romanian nationalism. After the fall of the communist regime, religious effervescence inspired Romanian clergy and the laymen alike, echoing the wide, popular trust of citizens in the national Church. The daily public presence of the Church in the media, especially of the Orthodox one, proved that in various cases the church as an institution became the legitimator of political decisions and sometimes also of party initiatives. According to polls, Romanians appeared to trust more the Church than any other institution, which speaks for the political manipulation of the religious belief and of the strength of populism. At the same time, such opinions spoke eloquently about the quality of democracy and the missing traditions of civil society. In many regards the Orthodox Church was considered as the most powerful opponent of European integration.¹⁹ The Romanian society has undergone the impact of a double process of secularization during the last century, the one imposed by communist ideology to which there had been added other secular influences emerging from different international factors. Immediately, after the fall of communism, in a period described as insecure from an existential point of view, Romanians relied increasingly on the promises of the religious discourse.²⁰ But after 2000, a decrease in religiosity was remarked upon, due to the relatively higher standards of living. Again, the situation changed in 2008, with the shock of the economic crisis in Romania. Such oscillations prove the Romanian deficit of modernization and that secularization was premature in Romania.²¹

Instead of a conclusion, I think that religion will continue its ascending course in public matters, asserting more clearly its role of a society mediator and probably of a competitor for a better representation of its institutional interests but also for the people's discontentment with the decisions of European integration. Culture wars in America as well as European economic integration might cause social confrontations fuelled by populism, nationalism, ethnic issues and migrationist fears. Regionalization in Eastern Europe could resuscitate old religious fears and feuds and the vortex of glocalization may provide churches, mosqs and temples new chances to make people bow in respect for an ancient and yet new, revered authority.

19 Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, London: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 199-207.

20 Mălina Voicu and Andreea Constantin, "Religious Revival in Romania: Between Cohort Replacement and Contextual Changes" in Gert Pickel, Kornelia Sammet (eds.), *Transformations of Religiosity. Religion and Religiosity in Eastern Europe. 1989-2010*. Springer, VS, Wiesbaden, 2012, pp. 157-159.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

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