THE LATIN CHRACTER OF THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: Romania's integration into The European Union implies, along with the important and intricate political, economic and social aspects that we can constantly notice, a series of cultural and linguistic issues, whose role within this general integrating process cannot be overlooked or minimized. For instance, regarding languages, we should keep in mind that they are a constitutive part of the psycho-cultural identity of the peoples who speak them.
Starting from the fact that "according the the current dominant EU view it is considered that the national languages of the member states have always been an important factor of international (cultural and linguistic) enrichment"[1], we find it quite opportune to perform a multifaceted analysis of the specificity of Romanian and of the place it holds in the contemporary European linguistic mosaic.

Keywords: latinity, the Romanian language, culture, European, national specificity

Romania's integration into the EU determines important changes in the field of public mentalities and also concerning scientists' and intellectual elites' viewpoints, who are tempted to minimize traditionally fundamental values. One of those values is national specificity, which, even if appeared as a result of the creative efforts of tens of generations, should, in some people's view, be "melted" in the western European spiritual alembic. As Gabriel Stănescu noticed, in this climate, "the presentday priorities doesn't concern the foregrounding of the native predispositions which separate us from the other peoples, but, on the contrary, the common elements which intitle us to synchronize ourselves with the system of European values"[2].

It is not for the first time in the history of the Romanian people when their language and culture are submitted to similar pressures and when they borrow various elements form other languages and cultures, at the same time, adapting them to their own specificity, and European integration is likely not to be the last influence exerted on Romanian spirituality. The openness of the Romanian language and culture to novelty and their capacity of absorbing it are in themselves dimensions of national specificity.

Over time, many criticisms have been made regarding the Romanian culture, considered unable to assimilate the borrowed European forms to its native background, the

[1] Ioana Vintilă-Rădulescu, ,,Limba română din perspectiva integrării europene"/"Romanian from the Perspective of European Integration" in *Tradiţie şi inovaţie în studiul limbii române/Tradition and Innovation in Studying Romanian*, Bucureşti, 2004, p. 37.
[2] Gabriel Stănescu, ,,Contribuţii privind profilul etnopsihologic al românilor. Încercări de tipologie a culturii"/"Contributions regarding Romanians' Ethno-psychological Profile. Attempts towards a Cultural Typology" in *Pentru o definiţie a specificului românesc/Towards a Definition of Romanian Specificity*, Bucureşti, Editura Criterion, 2006, p. 5.

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most exigent analysts being, in this respect, the representatives of the Junimea[3] cultural movement. On the contrary, most experts acknowledge Romanians' propensity towards adopting and adapting foreign cultural influences. For example, concerning the Romanian language, specialists (W. Th. Elwert, Alf Lombard) believe that it is among the most "hospitable" European languages[4] (together with English and Albanian, it shows the greatest openness to borrowings), at the same time featuring a high degree of permissiveness (its standard variant accepts popular and even dialectal words) and force of assimilation[5], the last two phenomena counterbalancing the neologic pressure to a certain extent. The decisive factors in defining the "European" character of the Romanian language and culture are both their Latin origin (Rome and its culture being one of Europe's pillars, with its Tracian substratum insertions (another pillar), and the specificity of the "influences" (mostly themselves belonging to sources of the European cultural matrix). Form this perspective, we consider that talking about the cultural and linguistic specificity of Romanians argues not only in favor of our non-separation from Europe, but, furthermore, proves our part in its "cultural" concert, due to our specificity which may have varied in intensity, but never in perceptibility. How distinct this voice is or how frequently it is assimlated to other voices depends on the epoch or domain, but what truly matters is its belonging to the whole, understood in the light of Herder's view[6], not as a passive condition, but as active participation within the whole.

Within the presentday context, the term *identity* is more appropriate than that of *specificity*, since the former better emphasizes the notion of particularization, even individualization, both in relation to other members and to the whole, since it expresses the inclusion of identical elements, similar to the whole and to the other members, which motivates the kinship.

Researchers have studied national specificity (or national identity) from various viewpoints and perspectives, the conclusions being different also because of the focus placed either on differences, reaching the level of oppositions, or on similarities, amplified to the level of being considered imitations. The objective and balanced approach of national specificity is as necessary today as in the past, since European integration requires promoting multiculturalism and multilingualism as a basis for constituting a common life and work frame[7].

The influences of foreign languages and cultures will continue, maybe even intensify, maintaining Romanian spirituality in synchrony with European spirituality, not through assimilation, but through enrichment, innovation, and adaptation. The dominants of its evolution remain the same and continue to be a source of vitality, of openness to other cultures, and also of inner resources' development. From among the main landmarks of its history, we should evoke its unity in diversity and its modernization in the spirit of the fidelity towards its Latin-Romance, and thus European, identity[8]. These are permanent and inseparable directions of evolution, which ensure its originality, its efficiency as an instrument of science and culture, and, at the same time, its progress at the same pace as the other European languages and cultures. Considering the above, we find it useful to give a brief view of the manner in which the Romanian language has evolved since its origin,

[3] See Mioriţa Got, *Multilingvismul în spaţiul european/Multilingualism in the European Space*, Bucureşti, Editura Fundaţiei „România de Mâine", 2008, p. 24.
[4] ELR, 2001, p. 406.
[5] ELR, 2001, p. 275. Cf. *Istoria limbii române*, vol. I, Bucureşti, 2018, p. 576
[6] Vlad Hogea, *Naţiunea, eterna iubire...* (Antologie)/*Nation, the Eternal Love* (Anthology), Bucureşti, Editura Samizdat, 2005, p. 9.
[7] Cf. Mioriţa Got, *Multilingvismul în spaţiul European/Multilingualism in the European Space*, Bucureşti, Editura Fundaţiei „România de Mâine", 2008.
[8] ELR, 2001, p. 324-325.

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focusing mainly on the degree to which its specificity converges, in a way or another, with the essential sources of the European cultural-linguistic topos that it has always been part of. Romanian linguistic unity and the corresponding cultural unity, together with the unity of customs and mentalities, have ensured this people its territorial continuity and its European identity, constituting the premise of its integration within united Europe's polymorphous ensemble.

Resuming the debate on Romanians' linguistic and cultural identity in Europe in the context of integrating Romania into the EU structures results in the awakening of our people's "historical sense", based on the relation between its national specificity and universal values, first and foremost European values, as it appears in spiritual creations, among which language is a fundamental one.

Somehow, the new European context of integration changes the data of the old debate regarding the relation between "national" and "universal": on the one hand, the European peoples, among which the Romanian people, too, overtly manifest their aspiration towards an all-encompassing unitary civilization, on the other hand, they act towards promoting their own values in the European multicultural concert. In this way, a *sui generis* spiritual dynamics is created, unity in diversity, or, in other words, diversity for unity. Compromises, on all sides (the multicultural border permeabilization, and the broadening of the common cultural fund) don't envisage overlooking one perspective for the sake of the other, but consolidating one through the other: national specificity can be enhanced through foreign influences and European culture is enriched by incorporating the contributions of the members. Part of this dynamics, national languages play a special role, derived from their basic ethnocultural vocation.

The Romanian language represents an indispensable and, one can claim, symbolic component of our people's identity, being a form of Romanian culture and, at the same time, the basis of this culture, as a main means of creating it. Aware of that, Romanian scholars have constantly led our people's fight for cultural emancipation and progress ever since the earliest times, sharing the efforts for the preservation, defence and development of their inherited ancient language. This language came out victorious over time from all the aggressions and hardships, becoming the symbol and support of national unity, which it preceded, heralded and prepared. The individuality of the Romanian language is an intrinsic element of our national specificity among the other European peoples. Its place among the European languages establishes by and large the place Romanians occupy in the cultural architecture of the old continent, owing to the invisible network of heritage, tradition, and exchanges with other peoples. Romanians' presentday cultural identity can put the Romanian language on its frontispice, as a neo-Latin language, bearer of a mature culture, well differentiated among the other European cultures.

Eugeniu Coşeriu, one of the greatest world linguists, accounted for the specificity of Romanian among the other Romance languages from three perspectives: genetic, typological and spatial[9]. Through its inherited lexical items or through those developed from the former, both being its essential components, Romanian is "purely and simply Latin or neo-Latin"[10], being a part of *Eastern Romania*, together with Italian (G. Bonfante claimed that, if all Romance languages are sisters, then Italian and Romanian are twin sisters)[11]. But Romanian has an obvious individuality, as a result of the Latin elements preserved only in it, its forms

[9] Eugeniu Coşeriu, *Limba română – limbă romanică/Romanian – a Romance language*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2005, p. 69-92.
[10] Eugeniu Coşeriu, *Limba română – limbă romanică/Romanian – a Romance language*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2005, p. 116.
[11] Vezi Coşeriu, *Limba română – limbă romanică/Romanian – a Romance language*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2005, p. 78.

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coinciding with those of other conservative areas (Sard, Portugese, Spanish) and of the divergences, be they original (due to the substratum) or acquired (due to foreign influences – Slavic, Hungarian, Greek, Turkish). Typologically, Romanian is integrated into the general linguistic Romance pattern (an intermediary form, between synthetic and analytical languages, in relation to which modern French represents a deviation through its pronounced analytical character. Geographically, contemporary Romanian is the only representative of Eastern Romanity ("a Romance island in a Slavic-Hungarian ocean", as they often say), being characterised by the lack of the constant influence of classic Latin and by being attracted, through the common substratum and by multiple inter-influences, into the so-called Balkanic languages league (these languages feature an important number of common traits, differentiating them from their sisters belonging to the same genetic group).

A revelatory fact is that the Romanian language and Romanians themselves have inserted in their ethnonym, and glottonym, respectively, undeniable proofs of their origin, continuity and unity on their original territory, the first element, i.e. their origin appearing as a defining symbol. The most convincing proof of the Latin origin of Romanians and their civilization is represented by the ethnonym *Romanian* (*român*) and its word family: the *Romanian* language (*română*), the adjective *românesc*, the adverb *româneşte*, the noun *Romania* (*România*) itself[12]. The analysis of the psycho-social and linguistic process of the birth and evolution of these terms offers clear proofs of the origin of the Romanian people and its civilization, of its continuity on its original territory and its ethnocultural unity, even during those periods when its members were forced by hostile historical conditions to live in different states. A truth stated by Romanian and foreign chroniclers[13] and accepted by most experts[14] is that the basic term of the word family above-mentioned, the ethnonym *Romanian*, derives from the Latin *romanus*, designating the citizens of the Empire, in order to differentiate them politically, juridically and spiritually from barbarians (in 212 A.D. the emperor Caracalla issued an edict which granted full Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire). This is peremptory evidence that the Romanian people has always been aware of its Roman origin, in the most natural way, and so have its neighbouring peoples throughout time.

Both old and new reserches made by philologists and historians have evinced multiple facets which help us clarify the circumstances and various ways leading to the preservation of this term exlusively in the Romanian language (the term *romansch* designating the Retho-Roman language, then the population speaking it, derives from the Latin adverb *romance*).

A synthesis of these researches can provide a consistent and coherent view on the evolution of the ethnonym under discussion, including the implications regarding the historical destiny of the Romanian people. Linguists have proven that the appellative *român/Romanian* is the result of the semantic and phonetic development of the Latin *romanus*[15] in Romanian and it is often found in old Romanian texts[16]. Besides the ethnic sense, the term has developed in time other senses, 'serf' (cf *iobag*), 'husband' (cf *soţ*) and 'Christian' (cf. *creştin*)[17] and this is the consequence of the specific social, family and

[12] Nicolae Iorga, *Conferinţe. Ideea unităţii românilor*, Bucureşti, Editura Meridiane, 1987, p. 215-220.
[13] Cf. Vasile Arvinte, *Român*, *românesc*, *România. Studiu filologic*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983.
[14] Adolf Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor*. *Istoria unei idei*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 1972, p. 17-37; 56-66; 97-127.
[15] Vasile Arvinte, *Român*, *românesc*, *România*. *Studiu filologic*, Bucureşti Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 35-96.
[16] Sextil Puşcariu, *Limba română. II. Rostirea*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 1959.
[17] Eugen Stănescu, „Premisele medievale ale conştiintei naţionale romaneşti" in *Studii* 5/1964, p. 977; *Idem*, „Numele poporului român şi primele tendinţe umaniste interne în problema originii şi continuităţii", in *Studii* 2/1969, p. 189-206.

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religious relations characterizing the Romanian people, proving the central place the word under discussion has always occupied in the daily life of the people during all the periods of its development. Thus, these researches have discarded the false opinion that the only authentic popular form of the ethnonym would be *rumân* and that the current form *român* would be the result of the intervention of the Şcoala Ardeleană (The Transylvanian School movement) and other Latinist current adepts. The false opinion is contradicted by the dialect atlases and monographies which show that both in eastern dialects of Daco-Romanian and in the fărşerot dialect of Aromanian it is the form *român* which is in circulation, since it represents the natural result of the dialectal phonetic evolution[18]. The conclusion is that the intellectual elite did not "reconstruct" the authentic popular form, but only imposed the dialectal variant which was the closest to the Latin etymon.

There are some explanations for the preservation of the ethnonym *romanus* only in Romanian: the geographic isolation of the Romanians from the other Romance peoples, which caused them to detach themselves also by taking over names from the languages of the barbarian populations; Romanians belonged to the space of Eastern Roman Empire and cultivated economic, political and cultural relation with the latter, whose civilization was held in high prestige in these regions; the lack of powerful long-standing barbarian state-like political entities, which could have permitted the creation of new ethnonyms as in Western Europe (such as *France*, *Normandy*, *Andaluzia*, *Lombardia*); the preservation of formally and semantically related words: *română* (the language) – the descendent of the popular variant (*limba romana*) of *lingua latina*, the only variant in use after the 4-th century A.D. (in the Eastern world the language of culture was Greek) –, the adjective *românesc* and the adverb *româneşte*, formed probably ever since the period of Proto-Romanian spoken north of the Danube, with the native suffix *-esc* (the equivalent terms in the other Romance languages, derived from the Latin *romance*, glided semantically to other senses and domains – *roman* as a literary species (novel), *romantic*, *romanţă*[19]).

Considering how rooted the ethnonym *român* and its derivatives are in the life and spirituality of the Romanian people, it becomes obvious that the term *România*, thought by some to be a semi-learned lexical item, is directly based on the popular linguistic material, literary being only the manner in which it became acknowledged nationally and internationally[20]. It is true that the homonymous appellative *românie* was attested in the 17-th century, several hundred years before the corresponding proper name *România* appeared (the latter was used mainly by the generation who organized the 1848 Revolution in their fight for the political unification of all Romanians)[21], the circulated senses of the common noun making a semantic chain which leads to the function of country name: "the Romanian language" (cf. *lătinie*, *slavonie*, *românism*), "all the Romanians" (synonymous to the presentday *românime*)[22]. Continuing this semantic metamorphosis, the proper name *România* designated first "the territory inhabited by Romanians" (the former Roman province),

[18] Vasile Arvinte, *Român, românesc, România. Studiu filologic/Romanian, Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 85-90.
[19] Vasile Arvinte, *Român, românesc, România. Studiu filologic/ Romanian, Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 47-64.
[20] Vasile Arvinte, *Român, românesc, România. Studiu filologic/ Romanian, Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 80-84.
[21] Eugen Stănescu, „Geneza noţiunii de *Romania*. Evoluţia conştiinţei de unitate teritorială în lumina denumirilor interne"/"The genesis of the notion of Romania. The Evolution of the Territorial Unity Awareness in the Light of Native Names", in *Unitate şi continuitate în istoria poporului român/Unity and Continuity in the History of the Romanian People* (D. Berciu, ed.), Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 1968, p. 252-254.
[22] Nicolae Stoicescu, *Unitatea poporului român în Evul Mediu/ The Romanian People's Unity in the Middle Ages*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 1983, p. 148-150.

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"Romanians' country" and "the Romanian state"[23], once the national political reunification was accomplished. We notice that, centuries later, *România* resumed the process of toponimization of the term *Ţara Românească*, generalizing at official level what had always been general in popular language (the ethnonym *român* is semantically the superordinate term in relation to the appellatives *muntean*, *moldovean*, *ardelean*, *bănăţean*, *dobrogean*, *oltean*, which refer to the sense of belonging to a geographical region). The other two Romanian states, later formed, could not include the appellative *român* in their names, not to create confusions[24].

The validity of the assertions above is confirmed by the parallelism of the synonymous ethnonym *valah*, *vlah*, given by Germans (*Walach*) to the Latin population and which was then taken over by the other peoples, too. Later it narrowed its sense to the Latin population in Wallahia, probably for the same reasons mentioned before in reference to the appellative *român*, and then it designated the people resulted from the symbiosis between Romans and the native population (Dacians) – the Romanian people[25]; the presentday ethnonyms *Welsh* and *Wallon*[26], though originating in a common etymon, had a phonetic and semantic evolution which has made it impossible since a long time ago for the mass of speakers to identify it with the term *valah*, having the same etymology. That appellative was the source of the proper name *Valahia*, which, especially in the Middle Ages, designated Muntenia, but, in many documents, even the other Romanian provinces – Moldova and Transilvania (they were called *Valahia Mare* and *Valahia Mică*, or *Ugrovlahia* and *Moldovlahia*, *Transalpina* and *Cisalpina*, *Superior* and *Inferior*) or even all the territories inhabited by Romanians[27]. On the other hand, Ştefan cel Mare called Ţara Românească *l'altra Valachia*. The compounds *Romänien-Walachiei*, *Vlaho-românesc*[28] are also significant, they seem tautological, but, in fact, they gloss the Romanian term and that given by foreigners, and a confusion appears in the ancient German poem *Nibelungenlied* between the homonymous ethnonym and anthroponym, a knight who was coming from *Valahia* being called *Rămunc* ("Romanian")[29]. There are not few medieval sources which mention the proper name *Dacia* to designate the whole territory inhabited by Romanians, the component states covering the territory being *Dacias* (*Dacii*), which proves the consciousness of the ethnic unity of the population in these states, manifested both within their territory and beyond it[30].

Therefore, at a closer analysis, the "Romanian miracle" of its Latin continuity proves to be nothing other than a truly miraculous force of resistance, on this plane, too, to destructive pressures, an exceptional force of identity preservation under extremely harsh conditions, the pressures succeeding only in temporarily weakening the linguistic connections with the Latin roots, but never in suppressing them. These connections continued to exist in a latent state, and, under favourable conditions, became active and, centuries later, gave their

[23] Vasile Arvinte, *Român*, *românesc*, *România*. *Studiu filologic/Romanian*, *Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 122-145.
[24] Vasile Arvinte, *Român*, *românesc*, *România*. *Studiu filologic/ Romanian*, *Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 182.
[25] Vasile Maciu, „Semnificaţia denumirii statelor istorice romane"/"The significance of the historical Romanian states' names" in *Revista de istorie/History Review*, Nr. 9/1975, p. 1324-1326.
[26] Alexandru Rosetti, *Istoria limbii române/The History of the Romanian Language*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1986, p. 198, 743.
[27] Alexandra Graur, *Nume de locuri/ Place Names*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1972, p. 30.
[28] Nicolae Stoicescu, *Unitatea poporului roman în Evul Mediu/The Romanian People's Unity in the Middle Ages*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, p. 130-140.
[29] Vasile Arvinte, *Român*, *românesc*, *România*. *Studiu filologic/Romanian*, *Romania. A Philological Study*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 169, 196.
[30] Cf. Alexandra Graur, *Nume de locuri/Place Names*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1972, p. 116.

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name to the process of re-enacting the originary situation – a unique people (*Romanian*), descendent from Romans and Dacians, in a unique country (*România*), corresponding to the space where their ancestors and themselves lived and worked.

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