

ROMANIAN PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS REGARDING THE NATIONAL STATE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Cristian MĂDUȚA

“Vasile Goldiș” Western University of Arad

Faculty of Humanities, Politics and Administrative Sciences, Arad

Tel: 0040-257-282324 E-mail: cristian_maduta@yahoo.com

Abstract

At the beginning of the twentieth century Romanian people started to acknowledge their identity, their common culture and values, thus shaping the ideal of self-determination and national unity. One certain figure, of major importance in the political process of national unification in 1918, Vasile Goldiș had also a significant contribution from a spiritual point of view, adding further philosophical and cultural support in order to accomplish the consolidation of a common Romanian identity. He was a man of his time, educated in the spirit of the twentieth century ideals, embracing liberal influences, enclosing elements of European civilization in the Romanian national consciousness. More than this, through his all endeavors, Vasile Goldiș never rested in advocating the Romanian spirit and identity thus contributing to the enrichment of the European culture and civilization. The aim of this paper is to argue that the Romanian movement of self-determination and national unity promoted by Vasile Goldiș is a true expression of the larger contextual - historical and political – movement manifested at the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe.

Keywords: Vasile Goldiș, self-determination, Romanian national unity, Romanian identity

INTRODUCTION

The extension of practical philosophy in politics can be remarkably illustrated by the idea of acknowledging the people's right to self-determination. The starting point on the road of self-determination constituted the American President Woodrow Wilson's famous statement The Fourteen Points.

Surely, we cannot deny the realities of history, namely the collapse of the Russian Empire as a result of the 1917 revolutions and the victory of the Entente Cordiale. This historical-political context and the spread of liberalism in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century added ideological support in favour of shaping the ideal of self-determination and national unity for Romanians in 1918. Liberalism is a political and economic doctrine proclaiming the principle of individual political and economic freedom. At its origin, liberalism is a philosophical current that supports the idea that each human being has natural rights, by birth, namely: the right to life, freedom and property. The aim of this

paper is to argue that we can find certain European liberal ideas associated with one of the most influential figure of the Romanian self-determination and national unity movement, Vasile Goldiș. Vasile Goldiș represents what we can call ‘a man of his time’. First I will try to place Vasile Goldiș in the European philosophical, historical, and political context and then I will argue for his major contribution in shaping the Romanian spiritual identity.

Born in 1862 in Mocirla, a small village of Arad County, student of Arad Theoretical High School, Vasile Goldiș developed a keen interest in history, literature, and philosophy as student of the University of Budapest (1881-1882; 1884-1885) and the University of Vienna (1882-1884). He became member of the Romanian National Party in 1893 and, wanting to affirm himself in the Romanian political struggle for national rights and unity, in 1905, Vasile Goldiș approached a new political strategy, known as the “new activism”, an active and dynamic method which stated the implication of the Romanian representatives in the political life of Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Vasile Goldiș had an essential contribution in the National Assembly of 1st December, 1918 in Alba Iulia and his political vision is reflected through the most important programmatic documents (manifests such as "To the People of the World", "To the Romanian Nation" and "The Solemn Speech in Alba Iulia") that have contributed to the replacement of general passivity with the idea of political activism. After the Romanian Great Union he was elected deputy in the Romanian Parliament and honorary member of the Romanian Academy. He withdrew from politics during the last years of his life and died in Arad on 10 February, 1934.

Educated in the German school of philosophy, Vasile Goldiș – an opened spirit to universality - assimilated the native Romanian culture and streams of thought, along with the European (Greek, Latin, German, French, English, Italian, and Hungarian) philosophy and civilization. He directed his activity to educate new generations of students in the Romanian historical spirit. Writing articles for the “Românul” (The Romanian) – a newspaper with a major role in the cultural life of Arad, Vasile Goldiș expressed his own idea of national identity and promoted the Romanian culture, elements connected in order to promote the ideal of national unity, the national consciousness and the union of all Romanians into a single national state. Very much connected to the international political atmosphere of the beginning of the twentieth century, Vasile Goldiș designed his endeavors according to the doctrine of self-determination and national unity and, in respect to the liberal doctrine, he advocated the ideas of political and economic freedom for all Romanians.

EUROPEAN INFLUENCES

The philosophical-judicial understanding of the state as a form of public power organization in the society has a long history. The history of the constitutional state is marked by important philosophical works, such as John Locke’s, Charles Montesquieu’s, John Adams’, Thomas Jefferson’s, G. W. F.

Hegel's, etc. The political and judicial ideas and institutions of Ancient Greece and Rome had a decisive influence on the formation of theoretical representations and, afterwards, on the judicial state practice. The fundamental ideas focus on aspects referring to the equitable construction of the *polis*, its powers and laws, the rational allocation of powers among different state bodies, etc. The ideas of ancient authors (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero) regarding the above-mentioned group of problems decidedly influenced the design and division of powers in the modern constitutional state (Deleanu, 1996, 163-164).

Important modern thinkers (Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Hegel, etc.) connected the political freedom idea both to the issues of state organization and citizens liberties and responsibilities. One characteristic of this relation, set up in the state division of powers, manifests itself in every institutional-organizational structure, is needed to ensure the subsequent feature of freedom of rights and civil liberties, meaning the individual security. If these basic characteristics do not merge, political freedom will remain incomplete, unreal and uninsured. Therefore the knowledge of natural (innate and inalienable) rights and freedom turns to be imperative (Murgu & Stoicu, 2008, 32).

Ideas belonging to philosophers and political figures of the Modern Age, mainly those concerning the unalienable human rights and liberties and the state division of powers, had a great influence not only on the subsequent theoretical representations of the constitutional state, but also on the constitutional legislature and state judicial practice.

The declaration of judicial freedom of all people in the French Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights in 1789 had a global historical importance. The Declaration stated, in the spirit of the ideas of the social contract, that the goal of the state union lies in the certification of natural and unalienable human rights. The distinction between human and citizen rights, promoted in the 1789 Declaration, basically makes the difference between the human being in general, as a particular individual, and the political being – citizen of the state.

The establishment of nations process, as coherently structured human communities, having their own ethnical, linguistic and historical identity, developed between 1815 and 1918, has been characterized in historiography as “the century of nationalities” (Berindei, 2002, 4).

The European dimension of national unity has been influenced both by the subscription of this event in the encompassing context that led to the formation of “ten new state entities in the European space between the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic Sea, and by its realization as the accurate application of the everlasting values of European democracy: the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms of people and individuals, the refuse of violence in the process of unification, the tolerance towards the aspirations of national minorities in Transylvania” (Vese, 2007, 368 – my translation).

CULTURE AS AN EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Culture plays a special part among the origins and the development of the determined factors for the nation and for the national conscience because through culture it is manifested the vocation that creates a nation. Culture encompasses the value of national personality, representing the persistent axiological nucleus of any human community. Society, culture, values, are all enclosed as parts of a mutual conditioning, necessary and specific report. "The human culture evolved to that development level so the principle of nationality reached the dignity of a truly sacred cult. History shows that small people were not at peace when their proper culture was harmed. This is where we stand today regarding the principle of nationality - excerpt expressing the Romanians' Transylvanian protest in the struggle for national rights.(Hurezean, 1975, 21)

Culture had a decisive role in the affirmation of the unity of the people in the Romanians' conscience, in the stimulation of the struggle for the ideal of state political unity accomplishment. Even religion contributed to the shaping of the national particularity, by cultural elements that evolved in the ideological and institutional patterns of religion, representing dominant forms of conscience and spiritual culture. (Dumitrescu – Busulenga, 1973, 17).

The Romanian Enlightenment, inaugurated at the Latinist School of Ardeal, represented a moment with deep resonances in the national conscience of Romanian culture, enclosing the Roman character into the essence of the national conscience, in the generous spirit of Latin Purism. As one of the most representatives Romanian national identity figures, Lucian Blaga, pointed that the Romanian Enlightenment represented "the first great spiritual adventure of Ardeal" (Transylvania). "The inner fire of those people, in fact true scholars, was never enough valued, nor that increased passion and self-control or that game without any historical outbursts proper to extroverted natures, and that warmth which slowly raises from depths to nourish and to sustain a life-time struggle of mortal saints, united for a supreme goal" (Blaga, 1972, 171-172 – my translation).

These assumptions regarding the European culture are submitted to "an effort of passing from a function of South-Eastern European resistance to the participation at the continental concert and the modernization of culture, which evolves from the 'Orthodox rationalism' of the humanists' towards the laicization of the concept of life" (Duțu, 1968, 360-361 – my translation).

Hence, due to the technical advances, the blooming of culture, the level of well-being and the independence of the people, Europe frequently appears as a model in the Enlightenment writings from all over the Romanian territory, next to a series of traits characteristic of the Romanian spirituality, terms such as „country”, „patriot” being exceptionally frequent because of the contacts with the „Enlightened Europe”. The problems concerning the conscience of origins and continuity, the unity of national language and feeling, the promotions of national culture and humanism as a spiritual attitude are now treated with an intellectual interest and a depth of thought, being integrated in an encompassing revolutionary

program.

Intellectual continuity is a cultural factor, analyzed by A.D. Xenopol (a well-known Romanian historian), acts as a cultural nucleus because it expresses and explains the force of routine, “the force of cultural tradition”. Due to this nucleus of intellectual continuity, the present can be linked to the past (Biriș, 2001, 111-112). The second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century are ages of cultural fulfillments, the classic age of Romanian modern culture.

DEFINING VASILE GOLDIȘ’S IDEAS

Applying Cicero’s vision, who believed that “History is life’s teacher” – “*Historia magistra vitae est*”, Vasile Goldiș strongly believed that politics connects with history and philosophy, by legitimizing actions and animating ideals and interests. Thus, the identification of history as a theoretical field of study with specific principles, rules and concepts, with a distinct methodology, intersects with the religious, philosophical and ideological visions.

For Vasile Goldiș, history could not represent just a simple object of academic study, with no end for everyday present. The presents study strongly underlines that his vision of history has to function as an argument to legitimize the political action. This idea explains some influences that can be identified in Vasile Goldiș writings, although his values are internalized and designed as perfect archetypes, as autotelic entities with power to dominate the souls of individuals and people, as authors of historical and practical events, and acting as super-historical prototypes (Goldiș, 2007, 208-210).

Dominant values and ideas of different historical periods can change places in the historical hierarchy or can end their mission. At the same time, values can represent not only the ultimate goals, or ideals to be achieved through human actions, but also they can be selection criteria for rejecting the non-values, for determining the progress of culture and civilization. Goldiș believed that “freedom of belief, thought, and above all the national freedom prevails from all other elementary criteria of any civilization” (Goldiș, 2007, 359-362 – my translation).

Vasile Goldiș identified the progressive meaning, the gradually approach to an ideal, in addition to the fact that civilization’s and society’s progress is based on the development of the social bodies’ potential to dominate the nature, on imposing social justice based on solidarity and on Christian precept of love, and on the gradual and continuous acceding of the human soul towards the absolute divine. (Iovan, 2006, 63-67).

At the top of the historical pyramid, Vasile Goldiș placed the spiritual values, primarily the religious virtues, considered to be the true column of human civilization. The religious faiths mingled with the cultural values are indispensable and represent the most effective tools in the struggle for developing the human civilization (Gagea, 2008, 189).

The analysis and hermeneutic research of Vasile Goldiș work could determine a coherent vision of human history, explained by a very comprehensive and exceptional knowledge of the national and world history. Although he did not formulate a general theory of values, Goldiș stated true landmarks of value and valid judgments and axiological criteria for political decisions, targeting values such as truth, justice, love, freedom, human happiness, beauty, culture, welfare. These values were correlated with appropriate means of political action, with people's capacities and contemporary social organizations, the most important example being the historical National Assembly in Alba Iulia, December 1, 1918 (Gagea, 2008, 189).

When stating that history, as a discipline, must reflect all cultural developments of humankind, Vasile Goldiș considered the universal historical development as a whole, each side, country, nation has a specific place and role. We can clearly affirm that Vasile Goldiș nation's prototype, inspired by the Western models, is shaped in an original manner, adapted to the Transylvanian circumstances and context. Along with the contemporary intellectual generation, in his writings and actions, Goldiș clarified the specificity of the cultural identity, the religious, ethnic, political, social, legal and historical meanings of the Romanian nation. According to Vasile Goldiș, a new life concept, based on morals and ideals for the community service, should be placed at the very base of the State. The social justice will prevail if a society is based on and takes advantage of Christian morals and love, thus criticizing the materialist Marxist conception of history, which falls into the category of utopias or "the dead assumptions" (Goldiș, 2007, 276-278). The Romanian politician argued that the extreme liberal doctrines issued from an exclusive focus on the promoting and justifying the individual rights, had failed from the historical point of view. Thus the idea of historical and social progress and its application relies on the nature domination, increasing justice in society, and gradually approach to divinity. The aspiration to the absolute prevails in front of other human actions and it determines the progress of any social formation. Spiritually, any social organism can evolve to a higher lever of civilization, while the social organism that adopts pure materialism, selfishness or disunion will decline and eventually, disappear (Glück, 1998, 205-215).

Vasile Goldiș proved to be a Christian spirit and an intellectual who analyzed existential problems, finding solutions for the Romanian identity. His approach of historical, cultural and Christian elements demonstrates a genuine philosophical spirit.

CONCLUSION

Modern Romanian cultural life was crossed by various contradictory tendencies, by the confrontation between traditionalism and modernity, cultural directions and criteria that had to lie at the foundations of any intellectual conception. These orientations and tendencies fit into the movement of international and European ideas, adding the element that is characteristic to the

Romanian spiritual space. In the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, numerous personalities and cultural-patriotic societies from all the Romanian provinces aimed at the spread of national culture in largely popular layers in order to contribute to the awakening and development of national conscience and the realization of the national unity ideal through culture. Vasile Goldiș was one of them.

“The dialectic of values and their historical movement is a completely harmonious process, which is part of the general nature-human-nature unity, through which the relationship between the individual and society becomes more and more human” (Cruceru, 2004, 179 – my translation).

The profound knowledge of the Romanian history, national customs and traditions, of the Romanian state of mind, generated the apparition of a specific Enlightenment. It is the time when we find the diverse and feverish cultural activity of Vasile Goldiș. It is the configuration of a present spirit, linked to European problems, characterized by a profound and obvious national characteristic.

Vasile Goldiș always sought answers to questions about the meaning of life, human history, the grounds of social existence, the possibility of knowledge, science, philosophy and religious report; he issued his opinions as a particular position in the background of the European thought, continuing the line of platonic philosophy, but also assuming the concepts of the Romanian philosophy of history tradition. The modern values – the human rights, the democracy, the constitutionalism, the respect of national sovereignty - represent values which sustain historical justice; for the European civilization, the state has a historical nature through different evolutionary stages, and Vasile Goldiș sees a future planetary unification: a single social organism with a single national consciousness.

In his philosophical arguments, one can find the appeal to the national history in order to reveal the equitable nature of these assertions, together with more proofs of natural law, philosophy or the spiritual values. Furthermore, his ethical vision is legitimized by a deep religious Orthodox piety linked to militant patriotism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BERINDEI, Dan, (ed.), *Istoria românilor (Romanian History)*, Vol. VII, tome I, *Constituirea României moderne (1821-1878)* [*Constituting Modern Romania (1821-1878)*], Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2002.
2. BIRIȘ, Ioan, *Sociologia civilizațiilor. O abordare metodologică (Sociology of the civilizations. A Methodological Approach)*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001.
3. BLAGA, Lucian, *Izvoare (Springs)*, Ed Minerva, București, 1972.
4. CRUCERU, Dan, *Identitatea axiologică a culturii. Eseu despre realitatea și virtualitatea valorilor culturale (The Axiological Identity of Culture. Essay on the Reality and the Virtuality of Cultural Values)*, Ed. Economică, București, 2004.

5. DELEANU, Ion, *Drept constituțional și instituții politice (Constitutional Law and Political Institutions)*, vol. I, Ed. Europa Nova, București, 1996.
6. DUMITRESCU-BUȘULENGA, Zoe, *Sinteze (Syntheses)*, Ed. Eminescu, București, 1973.
7. DUȚU, Alexandru, *Coordonate ale culturii românești în secolul (Coordinates of Romanian Culture in the Eighteenth Century)*, Editura pentru Literatură, București, 1968.
8. GAGEA, Eugen, *Vasile Goldiș (1862-1934). Monografie istorică. (Vasile Goldiș. (1862-1934). A historical monography)*, “Vasile Goldiș” University Press, Arad, 2008.
9. GLÜCK, Eugen, *Izvoare arădene cu privire la gândirea lui Vasile Goldiș în perioada 1910-1918, privind problema națională (Arad’s Historical Resources Concerning Vasile Goldiș Thinking for the National Problem during 1910-1918)*, in *Studia Universitatis “Vasile Goldiș”*, nr. 8, 1998.
10. GOLDIȘ, Vasile, *Scrieri social-politice și filosofice (Socio-Political and Philosophical Writings)* Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2007.
11. HUREZEAN, Damian, *Națiunea și problema națională (Nation and National Problem)*, Ed. Politică, București, 1975.
12. IOVAN, Marțian, *Problema sensului vieții și moralitatea în viziunea lui Vasile Goldiș (Vasile Goldiș- Meaning of Life and Morality)* in *Studii de Știință și Cultură*, vol. II, no. 2(5), 2006.
13. MURGU, Simeon, Mihaela Narcisa STOICU, *Drept constituțional și instituții politice (Constitutional Law and Political Institutions)*, Cordial Lex, Cluj-Napoca, 2008.
14. VESE, Vasile, *Tratativele de la Arad din 13-14 noiembrie 1918 și semnificația lor pentru unirea Transilvaniei cu Regatul României (Treaties from Arad from 13-14 of November 1918 and their meaning to the Unification of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania)*, in *In honorem magistri Camilli Mureșanu*, edited by Nicolae EDROIU, Susana ANDEA, Șerban TURCUȘ, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2007.