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POLITICAL PARTIES AND RELIGION IN POST-DECEMBRIST ROMANIA

The present text aims at mapping out a synopsis of the main political parties from Romania after 1989 on the one hand, and at pointing out the way in which their activity interferes with religion, on the other hand. To this point we have endeavored to place emphasis on the role played by the church within the Romanian society, as well as the main paths of influence the clerical representatives may exert upon the political life, occasionally voluntarily, yet involuntarily for the most part.

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Introduction

The democratic system from Romania has faced our society with a new challenge. Following a long period of communist dictatorship, the individual and collective mentality was compelled to adjust to a new definition of freedom. This value of democracy has been differently grasped by the societal realities of the post Decembrist Romania. There are several aspects in which the concept of freedom has been applied in the immediate aftermath of December 1989 events, with two rather narrow meanings, namely “we do what we please” and “we only benefit from rights”. Society, by acting, unfortunately, preponderantly within a paradigm, based, way too deeply, on the two afore mentioned meanings, has come to understand democracy in an original “Romanian” manner, and develop consequently its own system on these foundations. We deem it right that, except for the formal systems (army, police), all the systems of the Romanian society have accepted more or less the above mentioned paradigm. Not even the political system did obviate sufficiently the two meanings of the term. The transition from a single-party to a multi-party system, encompassing ideologically different parties, with sundry political actors and dissimilar speeches etc. hasn’t been easy, particularly with respect to the large public view upon this change. From our view point, rather relevant segments of the society bear to this day the mark of communism, claiming that political parties “are not of much use” or that “it was better before”. Obviously, many forces hostile to the west democracies were manifested after 1989, even if declaratively favorable to the multi-party establishment. Moreover, the structures of the late Communist Party could not evaporate overnight. Two, even three electoral

cycles had to unfold so as the Romanian political mentality to accept the newly created situation consequential to the fall of communism. Additionally, a further aspect is poignantly manifest these days: the political opportunism. Few are those who rise above times, and times unfortunately lie above most, leveling and middling them.

The present paper aims at sketching an analysis of the political Romanian life, endeavoring to cover the political activity both during the electoral campaigns and inter-electoral ones, as well as the role of the church in this period. Our endeavor will attempt an analytic-descriptive approach, using the participative survey and the content analysis method, doubled by the fact that I've been politically active all these years, both directly by my membership to the European parliament, and indirectly by my position as political PR counselor. The fundamental starting thesis is the following: the church and its representatives interfere more or less voluntarily with the political act, at whatever level, both within the electoral and inter-electoral periods.

Political parties and alternation to government

Within the 20 years there have been many political factions, but few were relevant in the view of the voters. What comes as a vexed question for today's electorate, with regard to the development of the political parties in Romania, is that, by the end of the 20 years, they haven't managed to assert themselves with a certain political ideology, but rather through some representative marketing vectors, or, in other words, through some personalities of the respective parties. The lack of a party school, with the objective to prepare active or sympathizing members for certain parties was acutely felt for years and years. Only with the latest period of time, politicians became aware of this issue, placing more and more emphasis on these schools. If this problem, which boils down to the internalization of some basic matters connected with the political life, can be solved with these schools, it remains to be dealt with the next biggest problem, namely the dissemination of these ideologies at the level of the collective mental of the entire society. This aspect is connected to another equally important one, that is to say the endeavor to create a "public image"¹ to the parties and to familiarize society with the connection between a certain party and the ideology that has crystallized around it. From our view point, both the acknowledgement of a certain ideology at the level of the collective mental, and the acknowledgement of the correlation between a certain ideology and a certain party, may be achieved through two methods:

1. field work (especially within inter-electoral periods);
2. the promotion with all means of the ideological political programs.

Employing these methods, the parties also manage to consolidate a certain identity which in M. Ghilezan's views "is the way through which any organization is recognized by a clear distinction compared to the others".²

With regard to the development of political pluralism and parliamentary democracy in Romania, we take into account several stages:

a) the first stage meant the acknowledgement by the society of two great political blocks in the immediate aftermath of 1990, namely the National Salvation Front (FSN), on the one hand and the historic parties on the other hand: the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD), The National Liberal Party (PNL), and the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSDR) governed by Sergiu Cunescu. This first dichotomy has done a great deal of good to the democratic spirit of Romania, as it was in premiere after over 50 years to develop a real political rivalry. The rivalry was, from one standpoint, real, but also unequal. It was real because the electors already had the opportunity to vote freely from among several choices (among the representatives of several political parties) the one that suited best their convictions. It was rather unequal because, from where we see things, most of the late Communist Party structures felt more protected by National Salvation Front and therefore most members of these structures became members or sympathizers of National Salvation Front. Particularly after the 1992 elections, holding all the control levers, as well as the late structures, National Salvation Front gained more power over the other historic parties. Thus, after 1990, and especially 1992, the Romanian parties had equal chances but unequal means and levers of development. With a mind to equity, we consider worth mentioning the following aspect, namely that members of the late communist structures were also infiltrated within the historic parties, though, not as many as in National Salvation Front.

b) The second stage practically involved two sub-stages:

- The former sub-stage is marked by the awakening of nationalism at the level of the collective mentality, through the "Vatra Românească"³ Union, and subsequently through the Party for Romanian National Unity (PUNR). In the same direction, the Greater Romania Party (PRM)⁴ starts expanding in this very second stage, and will reach its peak in the year 2000.
- The latter sub-stage was marked by the foundation of the Romanian Democratic Convention in 1991 (CDR)⁵. The assembly of the parliamentary opposition along with many representatives of the civil society constituted a historical act of great artistry staged by the regretted Corneliu Coposu (ex president of the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD) and political convict during communism). The Democratic Convention was also founded as a reaction to a certain National Salvation Front frailty, created by the scission of this faction in half: the first group, following Ion

Iliescu (the first Romanian president after 1989, ex communist dignitary, who also opposed to the Ceausescu regime) was to become the Party of Romanian Social Democracy (PDSR), and the second group, following Petre Roman, was to become the Democratic Party (PD). Both factions bore a central-left (social-democratic) political color.

c) The third stage is marked by Romanian Democratic Convention winning the parliamentary elections in 1996 and also by Emil Constantinescu being invested as President of Romania. The shift of political power in a democratic way, through elections, is the manifest sign of a working democracy. From our view point, 1996 brought forth, due to the respective elections, a change in the peoples' mentality, an alteration of "opinions, views, and convictions"⁶, as Le Bon put it. For the first time since the 1992 elections, the society felt the actual power of change in its hands, the previous government having failed the moment it did not converge with the masses' desires. People became aware that once in four years the power is up to them, and their vote counts. These elections emphasized one more aspect, namely that no one is in power forever. This message-idea should be held in view by all those who are, were or will be in power. But once the Romanian Democratic Convention has won the elections (event which was favorable for democracy), something rather connected with inertia and systemic conservatism than with democracy occurred: the structures remained unchanged. The following phenomenon happened: all those who remained in the state structures, at all levels, benefited from a certain grace period of six years (1990-1996) to adjust to the new context of altered political Romanian system. Unfortunately, the authorities after 1990 could not, or wished not, change the old structures radically.

d) The forth stage is illustrated by the 2000-2008 period. From how we see things, the main item which contributed to the consolidation of democratic values upon the collective mentality was alternation to governing. The year 2000 brings forth, along with the Party of Romanian Social Democracy (the strongest party, nationally speaking), another party on the political stage, namely Greater Romania Party. Consequent to elections, Greater Romania Party amounts to a total value of 20%, making it difficult to be left out of consideration in this period. National Liberal Party drops to a critical level around 7%, as well as Democrat Party. Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania stays constant around 6-7%.⁷

After 2000, Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party disappears from the parliamentary stage, failing to meet the necessary 5% threshold in order to gain access in Parliament. As a consequence to the 1996-2000 governing, the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party became the main and most eroded party within Romanian Democratic Convention. And thus, after ten years of democracy, small parties lose relevancy at parliamentary level and five main parliamentary forces gain shape. We

consider that the period between 2000 and 2004 was one in which preparations to split up presidential power from parliamentary power were made, 2004 bringing forth a four-year mandate for the future members of Parliament (deputies and senators)⁸ and a five-year mandate for the future President⁹. Moreover, this period gave vent to important political force reorganization, of which we mention:

1. Party of Romanian Social Democracy fusions with Social Democratic Party of Romania (the Sergiu Cunescu faction) and the outcome is Social Democrat Party (PSD)¹⁰, which holds to its name till today.
2. In order to create a counter-poll to Social Democrat Party, the National Liberal Party (which was better placed in polls) forms a powerful alliance with the Democrat Party, entitled Justice and Truth Alliance (D.A.).¹¹

After the 2004 local elections, two great political forces were shaped within the Romanian society, which were to confront themselves in the fall of 2004: the Social Democrat Party and the Romanian Humanist Party National Union (PSD+PUR) and the Justice and Truth Alliance (PNL-PD). Along with them, two other important parties (yet not as relevant to the collective Romanian mentality) are the Greater Romanian Party and the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania. The growth of a new party ruled by Gigi Becali is to be noted. This party was initially named New Generation Party (PNG) but then its name was changed into the New Generation Party - Christian Democratic (PNG-CD).

The year 2004 draws the public attention towards a bipolar system comprising of two great political alliances (National Union PSD+PUR and Justice and Truth Alliance), which, alongside all the others political parties were struggling to survive. Greater Romanian Party, although weakened obtains in 2004 approximately 13% and gets to Parliament, while New Generation Party fails to touch the minimum threshold and remains outside the Parliament. The biggest political surprise is brought by the end of the 2004 electoral campaign when the Social Democrat Party and the Romanian Humanist Party National Union (PSD+PUR), despite winning the parliament campaign cannot support Adrian Nastase enough to win the presidential elections. Traian Băsescu, supported by the D.A. Alliance, after a last-minute replacement of the first candidate of the above mentioned Alliance, Teodor Stolojan, becomes President of Romania. This success of Traian Băsescu was to totally change the balance of power in Romania. After long rounds of negotiations, Călin Popescu Tariceanu (president of the National Liberal Party) becomes Prime Minister of Romania, in a Government formed by members of the Justice and Truth Alliance (D.A.), of the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania (UDMR) and of the Romanian Humanist Party supported by the representatives of the national minorities, while the Social Democrat Party (PSD) (even though they had

obtained the biggest percentage of votes during the 2004 Parliament elections) gets to be in opposition after four years of government.

If, in the beginning of the 2004-2008 government, two important parties, namely the Social Democrat Party and Justice and Truth Alliance (D.A.) were making the political system, in two years, things got to change. The Justice and Truth Alliance (D.A.) tears apart and the Democrat Party gets out of the government. The public opinion, even though used to a bipolar system towards which the entire political class headed at the end of 2004, had to face a different reality, namely the coexistence of more than two important political bodies at the Parliament level. Both National Liberal Party and Democrat Party suffer significant modifications as such:

- a political group run by Teodor Stolojan rives from the National Liberal Party and is called the Liberal Democrat Party (PLD), while National Liberal Party remains in the Government and maintains its name;
- the Democrat Party shifts from centre-left to centre-right by affiliation with the European Popular Party and European Democrats (PPE-DE) and fusion with Liberal Democrat Party, thus forming a new political force named the Democrat Liberal Party (PD-L).

Under these circumstances the political system in Romania headed towards a new bipolar model based on two big parties: the Democrat Liberal Party and the Social Democrat Party.

The year 2008 brings forth a leveling of the forces, with respect to the territorial structures, between Social Democrat Party and Democrat-Liberal Party (after the local elections), with a slight advance for the Social Democrat Party, as well as a good representation of the National Liberal Party ratio at territorial level. After the 2004 elections, the Grater Romanian Party and the New Generation Party fail to develop powerful territorial structures, aspect that will interfere with the electioneering scores of these parties by the end of 2008. The Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania remains constant.¹²

e) The fifth stage, and the last, is marked by the period after the 2008 elections till the present. These last elections bring forth the political consecration of two great parties on the Romanian political stage, namely the Social Democrat Party and the Democrat-Liberal Party. The National Liberal Party reaches a historic score after the 1989 events, surpassing the 18%¹³ threshold, and the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania attains the same consonance due to a relatively stable electorate. The Greater Romanian Party and the New Generation Party fail to touch the minimum threshold of 5% and don't enter the Parliament after the general elections from 2008.

In other words, the dispute between the Social Democrat Party and the Democrat-Liberal Party upon the political supremacy is still on. The Social Democrat Party forms a pre-electoral alliance with the Conservative

Party¹⁴, succeeding to obtain the greatest number of votes. On the other side, the Democrat-Liberal Party, due to the uninominal vote algorithm succeeds to allot the greatest number of members of parliament for itself. Therefore, either of the two parties thought of itself as the number one political force in Romania. This aspect is less important compared to the mentality change brought about by the uninominal vote. For the first time after 1989, the Romanian citizens stopped to vote for party lists in the general elections, but voted for candidates. Obviously, these candidates were proposed by their parties in the uninominal colleges in which they aspired. We are also aware that territorial structures had great influence in the choice of one candidate or another, yet people, not lists, were elected.

From the analytical survey we have outlined, one can observe how political parties have evolved in the 20 years post December 1989. We are aiming towards a bipolar system, the main part being played by two great parties: the Democrat-Liberal Party and the Social Democrat Party. Within the bigger political frame, there are also other parliamentary parties such as the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania, as well as two parties which have not made the Parliament following the 2008 elections, namely the Greater Romanian Party and the New Generation Party. From our viewpoint, other parties, besides the above mentioned ones, will encounter great difficulty in gaining access to the Parliament with the future elections, firstly due to the lack of territorial structures, on the one hand, but also to the lack of prominent leaders and funds, on the other hand.

All these parties, regardless of their ideological orientation, have endeavored to fructify to the most any potential advantages springing from their collaboration with the clerical institutions, with religious representatives, by participating in activities of religious profile or invoking the divine power in their public activity. In the case of several of these parties, the presence of religion plays a significant role by the association of religion with the national idea, coming even to forms which may be associated with attitudes of intolerance and extremism.

Nevertheless, the dominant perspective is a temperate and tolerant policy, open towards all cults.¹⁵ The relationships of political actors with certain religious cults are amongst the most varied, depending on the promoted religious options and interests. At the same time, there is a rivalry among the different religious cults based on the size of a church, its power, patrimony or parishioners. Under these considerations, the affiliation to a cult or other may bring benefits to the political actor, but may also un-favor him.

In the case of our country, the politicians declare themselves orthodox more often than not, but some belong to other cults as well. The negotiating skills of the minority religious cults' representatives have proved, politically speaking, significant generating new types of political alliance, particular ways of interference with the mother church,

influencing, simultaneously, the relationships of the majority cult representatives with the other cults.

Religion, important vector of Post-Decembrist politics

In Romania, "religion plays an important role, influencing decisions made in other fields of life. Religion is still a factor both in molding the political options and in motivating work".¹⁶ Considering the synthetic analysis of the main political parties after 1989, we judge it mandatory to analyze the most constant vector, in the view of society members, which has acted greatly upon the development of the political class, namely the Church.

Confronted with a series of restrictions during the communist epoch, the Church, as an institution, managed to maintain itself as an important vector at micro and macro-climate level.

Romanian people are mostly Orthodox believers, but there are other cults which have played their part especially after 1989 in promoting Romanian politics or Romanian politicians. In the census of 2002, the Orthodox ratio was that of 86.8%, Roman Catholics represented 4.7%, Reformed believers 3.2%, Pentecostals 1.5%, and Greek Catholics 0.9% of the total population. Other religious factions with lower ratios were: the Baptists (0.6%), Seventh day Adventists (0.4%), Muslims (0.3%) and Unitarians (0.3%).¹⁷ According to article 29 (paragraph 5) from the Romanian Constitution "the religious cults are autonomous from the state and benefit from its support, including the facilitation of religious assistance in army, hospitals, penitentiaries, shelters and orphanages".¹⁸

We also consider that with the churches happens the same as in the case of political parties or important politicians, that is, some, such as the Orthodox, the Greek Catholic, the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Pentecostal Church, have left a more distinctive mark upon politics than others. Surely, more religious cults have gained recognition from the state throughout the Romanian territory¹⁹, bearing great importance due to the positive ideas they generate, but with regard to our paper the ones mentioned are considered the most significant.

Returning to the communist period, we would like to point out that we have taken part, with several occasions, to religious ceremonies in which the priests blessed the Romanian rulers, at that time, obviously Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu. As it can be observed from the scientific surveys upon the period, this situation was perceived as a collaboration of the Church with the communist regime with negative effects upon the relation between religion and politics and the context following 1989.²⁰ The Orthodox Church exerted the greatest influence on the relationship between religion and the political sphere, both prior and after the 1989 revolution, being the greatest and most powerful church within the national territory. Although it was acknowledged, at the time, that the

church exercised a great ascendancy upon people, we have often wondered about the rationales on which the totalitarian system has tolerated the church. We deliver two possible answers to this question, which we view as being most plausible:

1. The communist system acknowledged the fact that the church, though perceived as anachronistic against the communist ideology²¹, exercises a great ascendancy upon people and gathers people around some positive elements. The attack against the church within such a reality would have been unfavorable for the communist system, whereas tolerance of the church was beneficial for the very existence of the respective organism.
2. Some of the communist leaders may have had faith in God (to this point we don't exclude Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu) and consequently the church was left to unfold its natural activity, although some restrictions were imposed.

Nevertheless, the church survived the communist regime and subsequent to the 1989 events, it has consolidated as society's most powerful vector of faith, a powerful force within the public sphere and a factor of major influence within the political sphere.²² Undoubtedly however, at any stage during the humankind evolution, the clerical institutions also interfered with the "worldly affairs". From any angle we may perceive it, religion has always represented a force (be it a gentle force), which couldn't be neglected by any social order. During the 20 years that have passed since the events of '89, there were several visible ways through which the members of religious cults, as well as the ecclesiastical institutions, tacitly supported one political actor or another, one or several political parties. The church especially "assumed a central place in electoral campaigns, and turned the voters' attention away from the candidate's concrete policy proposals to their readiness to perform religious ritual."²³

Visible ways through which clerical members have supported politics

In the following we will reveal some of these visible ways through which members of the church have supported politics, sometimes voluntary (party-minded), but most of the times involuntary, or seemingly involuntary.

Direct ways

1. *Direct participation of priests in politics;*

We wish to point out our opinion from the very beginning: priesthood is a grace, not a mere job. Being aware of the muddy waters of politics

(even of the clean one), we think that it is very difficult for a priest to be a politician (under any form and acceptance of politics) as well as an altar servant. This doesn't imply that the priest shouldn't be involved actively in the community life, support his community, hold sympathies or political preferences, express his opinion on certain community or society problems. From our stand point, the priest can much better support his community from the priest's chair than from the politician-priest's position, because politics always gives vent to controversy in peoples' minds, whereas religious teachings bring forth harmony and communion. This is a subjective opinion we take upon ourselves. After 1990, there have been multiple cases in which priests were involved actively in politics, as local counselors and even deputies.

Political parties mean the activation of different interests and the church also means a sum of interests, though, by their preponderantly spiritual ending, of different nature. It hasn't been easy for the politician priests to maintain these interests in balance. This might have been the premise on which Bartolomeu Anania's initiative to ask priests to choose between the positions of priest or the political dignity, was based. Therefore, through the decision no. 410/ February 12, 2004, the Saint Synod of the Orthodox Romanian Church prohibited priests to do party-minded politics, be member of a political party, participate in electoral campaigns, run and become members of the parliament, of the local council board, mayors, vice-mayors or hold positions in the central public and local administration. The one who will disobey these rules, as well as the oath taken at the priestly investment, falls under the stipulations of article 3, letters "d" and "e" from the Procedure Statutes of disciplinary and trial instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church, having to choose between the political career and priesthood mission for ever, without the right to join the clergy again".²⁴ In 2008, this law has undergone the following amendments: "priest may take part in elections as independent candidates for the positions of local or district counselor with the approval of the superior bishop, but they cannot run for the position of mayor".²⁵

2. *Renunciation to priesthood;*

Another direct way is the following: the priest gives up the priesthood (becomes a former priest) and enters politics. In most of the cases, the politician priests preferred to carry on serving the church but there were cases of priests who took up politics in the detriment of priesthood. Those who went on as politicians, though having given up the priest coat, kept the label of priests within their native neighborhoods (in the collective representation).

3. *Individual political opinions;*

We live in a democratic state where any citizen is free to hold political sympathies or express his/her individual opinion with respect to a certain party or political actor. Priests as well may hold political sympathies and may vote for whoever they wish in a private way. It also goes without saying that they can utter political opinions within private conversations.

Indirect ways

The indirect ways are manifest both during electoral and inter-electoral periods. The most relevant inter-electoral indirect ways we consider being the following:

1. *The participation of politicians to different broadcast religious events;*

Christians celebrate several events during a calendar year. With the occasion of these holidays, religious services take place with the participation of high state officials. It is not our place to judge whether these political actors attend these broadcast services out of conviction or because of other motives, yet, their presence may represent a symbol-message for the population. This message is most probably the following: the respective politician is faithful, attends church, he is from among us and consequently one of us. The association between the priest and politician during the service holds positive effects upon the politician's image, in proportion with the dimension of the religious events attended by high state officials and church leaders who are held in high regard by parishioners. Such celebrations are attended by a great number of people; consequently the politician's popularity rises due to his participation. We wish to draw attention once more to the fact that we are not in the position to judge to what extent the participation to such manifestations is done out of faith or mere political speculation. We have not analyzed the causes, but the effects of political actors' participation to religious events. Moreover, as these celebrations are broadcasted by channels with national coverage, the political actor becomes visible nationally in this hypostasis.

2. *The participation of priests to broadcast programs, the topics of which, though connected to church issues, are politically oriented (for instance, the debate on the Nation's Cathedral);*

In the course of time we've been subjected to several shows debating this subject, to which, more often than not, a high church representative was invited. Inevitably, the train of discussion brought forth the position, financing, approval and, therefore, connections between church and political actors were formed. Obviously, all the political actors inquired thereafter if they are in favor of the project the Nation's Cathedral were

limited to offer a positive answer, creating a positive public image for themselves through such a message.

3. *Broadcast religious services, or other programs with a religious profile;*

We live in a world of interconnected elements, interfering and influencing each other. Similarly, religion interferes with the laic side of society, both sides exerting influences. There will always be common elements between religion and political ideologies. These intensely shared elements, such as: the good that lies at the heart of each of us, the shared good, the help given to the fellows, the unity of the community, etc., debated within the programs with a religious profile, reverberate and affect the individual and collective representation. A conclusive example is that of the influence exerted by the debates on biometric passports, debates that included members of the religious communities, civic associations, members of the academies and which have also influenced parliamentary activity and politic attitude.²⁶ Therefore, the high clerical figures may amend the public opinion solely by an approval of some of the above mentioned elements, or may involuntarily orient it verbally towards an ideology or another.

4. *The election of the Sovereign Pontiff and of the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarch;*

This is an event which takes place rarely, is extremely mediated and has an indirect influence upon politics. During the last election of the Pope, we have noticed, with stupor, that the nationality of the last Pope (Pope Ioan Paul II – Polish) and of the current Pope (Pope Benedict XVI- of German origin) was mentioned almost all the time. Thus, if Poland had, in the past, a pillar in Vatican, the Germans are enjoying this position now. Obviously, the Sovereign Pontiff is important as he is the “shepherd” of all Catholics, but to a certain degree (especially with respect to image and foreign affairs) his nationality is of equal importance. With regard to Romania, I have attended the election of Patriarch Daniel. This event seemed, at least beyond the closed doors of the Synod, to lack tensions, to be an election inspired by the Holy Spirit and made by the wise men in the church. But immediately after the investiture of the Patriarch Daniel, the natural congratulations of several high Romanian state dignitaries ensued. These congratulations were also broadcasted by the mass-media, and, thus, the respective politicians found another opportunity to create a positive public image for themselves. We do not exclude the pure grounds for this gesture, namely that the respective politicians sincerely congratulated the current Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Simultaneously, the gesture is doubly significant considering the relationship between religion and politics.

Among the most important inter-electoral indirect ways we depict the following:

1. *The participation of runners for any dignity to religious services during the electoral campaign;*

This is a practice preponderantly employed in the rural areas following the matrix: a communal centre, where the service is attended by a great number of parishioners is chosen for leading representatives of a certain political party, along with a certain candidate, to take part at the church service. Usually, these political figures are invited in the bench nearby the priest and altar. Therefore, they are exposed to the people during the entire service, and the simple countryside parishioners ask themselves the following question: who might be these sirs participating with us at the service? This question is answered by the priest right at the end of the service, who thanks those present (local people) as well as the political figures (from outside the village) for having joined the respective service. In some cases, the priest may even utter the name of the candidate as he thanks him for his presence. The mechanism, through which the image of the politician is improved, resides in the following: the local people who have participated at the service remember his face the moment he sees an electoral poster, and associate it to the fact that he attended the service. In such cases, the priest cannot be accused of doing direct politics, only of accomplishing the hosting etiquette, even if by uttering the candidate's name in the church, with the formal congratulation, helps him enhance his popularity within the respective community.

2. *The donations made by political actors for the churches;*

This is a method employed by politicians to promote their image. It is used also during the inter-electoral periods, but particularly during the electoral ones. Everything unfolds according to the following matrix: the candidate, along with prominent figures of the party, takes part in the service. By the end, the priest announces the parishioners and thanks the candidate for his donation. Usually, the priest also states the sum donated by the candidate. The greater the sum, the more impressed the audience.

3. *The discussions with the parishioners after the religious service;*

In order to avoid politics in the church, the candidate may use the following method: he participates along with his party colleagues at the service and, by the end, the priest asks the parishioners to linger in the front yard for a while, so as to discuss with Mr. candidate X for the dignity Y, who has been so thoughtful as to join them that day. It is an auspicious moment, as the candidate may speak to several people at once and is not compelled to go from house to house in order to disseminate his ideas. Usually less people attend such discussions than the church, yet there still remain enough people, who can be informed or even persuaded by the ideas or the political program of a certain candidate.

4. *Negotiations with certain cults, others than the Orthodox one;*

This is a method which can prove to be successful, because the members of such cults are more organized with regard to voting than the members of the Orthodox cult. Usually, the Baptists and Pentecostals are fewer and function as well structured and organized communities, so as the pastor may know each of them separately.²⁷ The candidates may participate to the services of these cults in order to be seen. If the pastor shares the views and projects of a candidate, he may portray him positively for the parishioners. If the political program of a certain candidate is accepted by such a religious community, he will most certainly be voted by a large percent of the community members.

Conclusions

The present paper starts from the hypothesis that the church, through its representatives, interferes, more or less voluntarily, with the political act at any level, both during the electoral and inter-electoral periods. The arguments presented above come to validate this hypothesis. The church representatives, even if they wished to stay out of politics completely, are unable to do so because, as shown above, they interfere most of the time involuntarily, due to the fact that they are part of the same system, namely the Romanian society.

The church represents an element of the social and cultural society which continues to play a fundamental role within the community life and within the political life consequently, bearing a coagulating role of the majorities and a symbolic role. In Romania, the church holds the first place in peoples' preferences in regard to trust, due to the values it promotes, under different forms. We also believe that the church will stick to this top place for a long time from now on, as it is not foreseeable that there will appear an equal rival system on the laic side of the society within a short while. To the same point we wish to note one more thing: due to a rapid rhythm of society development in all fields, the church has to adjust, in its turn, to the new realities, or we will be faced with some surprises, which might challenge us with realities contradicting our expectancy horizon. Yet these very surprises might represent the natural rhythm of humankind through ages.

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Notes

¹ Marius Ghilezan, *Cum să reușești în viața politică. Manual de campanie electorală*, (Bucharest: Active Vision Publishing House, 2000), 15.

² Marius Ghilezan, *Cum să reușești în viața politică. Manual de campanie electorală*, (Bucharest: Active Vision Publishing House, 2000), 14.

³ Vatra Romaneasca union was founded in 1990 by teachers and juridical people from Transylvania, you can find more information on the site, http://vatraromaneasca.ro/prezentare_vatra_romaneasca.php

⁴ the Greater Romania Party (PRM), "The statutes of the Greater Romania Party", <http://www.prm.org.ro/>

⁵ Wikipedia, "Constituirea CDR", http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conven%C5%A3ia_Democrat%C4%83_Rom%C3%A2n%C4%83

⁶ Apud Gheorghe Schwartz, *Politica și Presa*, (Iași: Institutul European Publishing House), 2001, 7.

⁷ University of Essex, "Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe", <http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections/>.

⁸ According to article 63, paragraph. (1) from the Romanian Constitution. The whole text of the constitution is available online on the site of the Deputy Chamber, at the following address <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339>.

⁹ According to article 83, paragraph (1) from the Romanian Constitution. The whole text of the constitution is available online on the site of the Deputy Chamber, at the following address <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339>.

¹⁰ Social Democrat Party site, "Social-democrația după 1989", <http://www.psd.ro/despre-noi.php>

¹¹ Liberal National Party site, "Alianța PNL-PD – Protocol", <http://www.pnl.ro/Public/art/3976/Alia-a-PNL-PD-Protocol.html>.

¹² Becloale2008, "Rezultate sintetice", http://www.becloale2008.ro/doc-umm/sintetice_FINALE.pdf

¹³ Becparlamentare2008, "Rezultate finale", <http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/rezul/anexa8abun.pdf>

¹⁴ Conservative Party, the ex Romanian Humanist Party

¹⁵ Lia Pop, „Toleranța: cucerire istorică și obiectiv politic”, în *Etnie, națiune, confesiune*, Sorin Șipoș (editor), (Oradea: Editura Universității Oradea, 1996), 137-165.

¹⁶ Mălina Voicu, *România religioasă: pe valul european sau în urma lui?*, (Iasi: European Institute:2007), 115.

¹⁷ The National Institute of statistics (INSSE), The population and house census, 18-27 March 2002, "Structura populației după religie", <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/vol1/tabele/t50a.pdf> Also see Claudiu Herțeliu, *Metode cantitative în studiul fenomenului religios* (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star Publishing House, 2009).

¹⁸ A series of articles from the Romanian Constitution refer to religion: Art. 4 (2), Art. 6 (1), Art. 7, Art. 29 (paragraph. 1,3,4,5), Art. 30 (paragraphs 1, 7), Art. 32 (alin. 7), Art. 48(2), Romanian Constitution. <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339>.

¹⁹ According to Jonathan Fox, the law recognized 14 religions in 1948, and in 1989 the Governments added the Greek-Catholic Church to the list. After 1989 two more cults were added, among which Jehova's Witnesses, Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 166.

²⁰ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, „Biserica și politica; religia ca determinant al culturii politice”, in *Politica după comunism. Structură, cultură și psihologie politică* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), 173-184.

²¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Despre religie* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1960).

²² According to an INSOMAR survey during Oct 28-Nov 6 2005, 87% of the Romanians trust the Church, the source <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/ziarul-lumina/78065-romanii-au-cea-mai-mare-incredere-in-biserica>.

²³ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202.

²⁴ The Saint Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, “The decision of the Saint Synod upon the priests' interference with politics”, http://www.basilica.ro/ro/stiri/decizia_sf_sinod_privind_problema_implicarii_preotilor_in_politica.html.

²⁵ Mediafax, “BOR: Priest may run as independents for local or county councilor”, <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/bor-preotii-pot-candida-ca-independenti-pentru-functii-de-consilier-local-sau-judetean-2438942>.

²⁶ Sandu Frunză, Mihaela Frunză, „Etică, superstiție și laicizarea spațiului public”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, (Vol. 8, No. 23, Summer 2009): 13-35. www.jsri.ro.

²⁷ Ioan-Vasile Leb, Radu Preda (ed.), *Culte și statul în România* (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2003).