

# Fluctuating Geographical Position within a Geopolitical and Historical Context. Case Study: Romania

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## Abstract

The geographical position of a territory is a statically element strictly determined by mathematical landmarks and by those of the natural background. For all that, different historical and geopolitical events that happened in the course of time, can make the geographical position fluctuate by including a territory / state into territorial aggregates established on less arbitrary criteria. Thus, many interwar authors placed Romania, by geographical criteria, in *Central Europe*; after 1945 they would include it in Eastern Europe, or in short, in the East, a political-ideological homogeneous territory, but heterogeneous geographically, historically and cultural. With the downfall of political-ideological barriers and the deep-going mutations in the geopolitics of Central and Eastern Europe, Romania's geographical position should be reconsidered based on objective criteria: geographical, mathematical and last but not least, cultural and economic. This study is also important because some recent works place Romania erroneously in South-Eastern Europe, either in Eastern or in Balkan Europe. The work concludes that Romania in a state situated in the south-eastern part of Central Europe. The arguments brought in favour of it have in view to push forward the current stage of knowledge on Romania's geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Geographical Position; Geopolitical & Historical Context; Central Europe; Romania

## Introduction, Methods and Data

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In one of the last studies on Romanian geopolitics published before the communist regime came to power, Conea (1944), quoting Vogel (1922), said that the geographical position is a static and somehow permanent characteristic, while the geopolitical position is changing. Romania belongs to a highly sensitive area of geopolitical friction, a territory known and defined as a “zone of geopolitical earthquakes”. The same author goes on saying that Romania has a central position, being surrounded by powerful states; it is a position far more dangerous, yet in time of peace it offers also multiple advantages, given the possibilities of establishing a lot of fruitful relations and influences (Alexandrescu & Deică, 2002).

That is why, Romania has in the course of time been placed by various authors either in Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, or Eastern Europe. Proceeding from mathematical, natural, cultural-historical, but also economic-geographical arguments, we shall try to demonstrate that Romania is a **Central-European state**.

The present study, more theoretical, is based on the interpretation, within a geopolitical, geostrategic and historical context, of some geographical sources that place it in different regional settings.

Analysing sources that place Romania within various regional assembles (Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, Balkan Europe), we shall

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argument why Romania “migrated” from Central Europe to the South and East of the Continent in the geopolitical context of the Communist period, a localization wrongly taken over even after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The arguments included in this study are aimed at improving current knowledge on this subject, contributing to elucidating some unclearnesses and eliminate some errors still made in placing Romania within a geographical context.

## Discussions

### The “evolution” of Romania's geographical position reflected in geographical and cartographical sources in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Proceeding from Europe's political outline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Romania acted as a buffer-state among the influence zones of three empires (German, Russian and Ottoman), the *Geographisches Handbuch zu Andrees Auflage* (1902), placed only the German States, Switzerland and Austro-Hungary (together with Transylvania, but without Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia<sup>1</sup>) in Central Europe (Mitteleuropa), having in view their cultural affinities and common historical relations. Partsch et al. (1903) enlarged this

For the purpose of this research, recognizable methods for approaches to collecting, analysing and comparing the data were used. For data collection, different sources were resorted to. Historical maps and pictures were analysed and compared to the present situation. Contributions to the evolution of borders in Central and Eastern Europe were reviewed with special attention to Romania. Findings were compared to statistical data and publications of different authors discussing this problem.

trian-Hungarian Empires in the centre, and Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria in the south-east (Figure 1).

Made up exclusively on the basis of historical arguments, this regional outline does not correspond to the geographical reality, pushing the limits of Central Europe southward. Although in the past they were part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro belong to Southern Europe and in no way to Central Europe.

The assertion of national identity in a Europe of multi-national empires and the beginning of the First World War created the premisses for ever more personalities of European science and culture to become aware of the appurtenance of the Carpathian-Danubi-



Figure 1. Central Europe according to J-F. Partsch, C. Black and H-J. Mackinder (1903)

concept, including in Central Europe all the geopolitical diagonal line between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, consisting of the following states: Benelux in the north-east, Switzerland and the German and the Aus-

an space to Central Europe. Thus, Sievers (1916) traced the Central-European frontier on the Dnistre and the Danube, basically including the entire Romanian ethnical bloc. By the end of the First World War, and subsequently during the inter-war period, similar delimitations were made by other representatives of the German geographical school: Arldt (1917), Hassinger (1917, 1923), Heiderich (1926) and Machatschek (1925, 1929). Repre-

<sup>1</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia were included into Southern Europe. In geographical terms, it is better to include Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia in South-Eastern Europe.



Figure 2. Central Europe according to Giselher Wirsing (1932)

representative for this opinion is Wirsing (1932), who included Romania, together with the Baltic States, Poland, former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the countries of the former Yugoslav space, as well as Albania and Bulgaria, into “Middle Europe” (*Zwischeneuropa*) suggested also by Penck as early as 1915. Also in this regional outline, the limits of Central Europe are arbitrarily pushed southward by including some Balkan states (Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia), that belong to the South-European geographical realm (Figure 2).

On the other hand, the geographers who placed Romania in the south-east of the Continent (Unstead, 1927; Schüssler, 1939, etc.), limited the Central-European space only to the two German-speaking empires and, in some cases, also to their neighbour countries in which populations of Germanic origin lived. Speaking of Romania’s appurtenance to the Balkan space, Schmidt (1932) contended that, “before the War, although Romania, speaking strictly geographically, did not belong to the Balkan Peninsula, it was nevertheless considered so, being the only country that lay outside the natural borders of this Peninsula”, while in Höpker’s views (1936), “Romania did not belong to the Balkan Peninsula in a strictly geographical sense... it is rather a question of a Balkan mentality, a psychological complex one could hardly define”. At the same time, other representative cartographic works, published then in the German space (*Mittleuropa. Austrian School Atlas by Slanar, 1928;*

*Übersichtskarte von Mitteleuropa, 1937* or *Generalkarte von Mitteleuropa, 1937*), placed all of Romania within Central-Europe, while others, e.g. *Ethnographical Map of Central Europe, 1942*, integrated only Transylvania and Bukowina into Central Europe (Sinhuber, 1954).

Fundamental early 20th-century French works also confirmed that Romania belonged to the Central-European area. In a work published in Paris by the Serbian geographer Cvijić (1918), the northern boundary of the Balkan Peninsula was the Danube River; speaking about the borders of the Balkan Peninsula, Ancel (1930) says that “sometimes the Danube is taken to be the northern limit of the Balkan Peninsula. But the middle section of the Danube has never been a borderline (...), the Danube does not divide, but unites the Romanian and the Balkan lands”. However, six years later he would change his views and place Romania in Central Europe, setting just the big River as the southern boundary (Figure 3).

But he who best defined the notion of Central Europe truly scientifically was geographer Emmanuel de Martonne, an excellent connoisseur of Romania from the beginning of the 20th century (Boulineau, 2001; Palsky, 2002; Bowd & Clayton, 2015). This term, Martonne would say (1934), should be used to designate the middle position of the countries considered to lie between a “better articulated” Western Europe and the “more compact” Eastern Europe. Therefore, he re-



Figure 3. Central Europe according Jacques Ancel (1936)



Figure 4. Central Europe according Emmanuel de Martonne (1934)

ferred to locating them between a Europe of peninsulas, gulfs and seas, and a Europe of endless fields. Beside Romania, De Martonne included in Central Europe also Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Figure 4).

Synthesising all these viewpoints, Romanian geographer Rădulescu (1938) considered Central Europe as the whole territory extending between the borders of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece in the west; Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the European part of Turkey in the east; he

*tural* boundary between the Slav peoples in the south-east of the Continent and the Romanic peoples from its central and western part. For all that, south of the Danube, in Eastern Serbia and in north Bulgaria regions, one finds Wallachian minorities as mixtures of Romanians and Slavs. It is the southern limit of German colonisations and the northern bound of the spread of Islam; at the same time, it is *the boundary between two distinct physical-geographical areas*: the Romanian Plain in the north and the Prebalkan Tableland in the south. It is also a *historical boundary*, because no empire



Figure 5. Central and Balkan Europe according to N-Al. Rădulescu (1938)

distinguished a Central-Western Europe of Germanic expression, represented by Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein; a Central-Eastern Europe, that is, Poland, Eastern Prussia (currently the Russian zone Kaliningrad), Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, while Balkan Europe included Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece (Figure 5).

Developed on the eve of the Second World War, this theory erroneously extended Central Europe toward by including some Balkan states (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia), as an expression of a presupposed Central-European alliance versus the Soviet Union that claimed, among others, also Romanian territories (Bessarabia and Bukowina).

In this way, the Danube became the northern boundary of Balkan Europe. It is an *ethnic and cul-*

based in the Balkan Peninsula territory could lastingly extend north of the Danube; it is a *psychological boundary*, the psychology of Balkan peoples being radically different from that of Central-European peoples; it is also an economic boundary, Romania's territory gravitating economically towards Central Europe.

A better nuanced position is expressed in the *Encyclopaedia of Romania* (coord. Gusti, 1938), the first comprehensive work devoted to unified Romania; in its first volume, starting from the territorial built-up of this country by the unification of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania, the highlight falls on the character of interference, harmony and unity of its territory: by way of its position at the cross-roads of Europe's big geographical lands, Romania has three sides: to Central Europe, to the south and to the Continent, all three meeting in

the Carpathian Chain, where they communicate by numerous passes, the three sides merging into the harmonious unity of the Romanian land.

### Romania's geographical position reflected in sources from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

For a lapse of 40 years, Central Europe and the term of "Europe" itself became the monopole of the geopolitical aggregate that lay west of the former Iron Curtain. In this way, Europe was associated with an "area of freedom" in opposition to Communist Europe, which gravitated around the Soviet Union, and was called *Eastern Europe*, or *the East* in short, a dominantly, ideological category without a definite territorial basis (Fourcher, 2000: 93).

The West-Europeans' perception of this territorial aggregate became ever more diffuse; whether it was Poland and Romania, or Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary, states belonging to different geographical areas and cultures, they were put in opposition to Greece, Spain, Great Britain, or Germany, countries integrated into the same economic and political-military blocs, but fundamentally different geographically and culturally (Halecki, 1950; Mutton, 1961). In this way, the northern limit of the Balkan Peninsula is pushed up to the Soviet borders, the only Central-European states, recognised as such, being Eastern Germany, Poland, former Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Jelavich, 1983; Castellán, 1991; Prevelakis, 1994, etc.), states which formed the Visegrád Group in 1991 (Prescott, 1987). Thus, in the 1972 editions of the prestigious *British Encyclopaedia*, Romania appears in "The Balkans" chapter, its real geographical boundaries being ignored in order to justify the idea of a "common umbrella" for the so-called "volatile" states.

The fundamental geographical changes that took place at the end of the 1980s led to reviewing geopolitical relations in the Central and East-European area, some old geostrategic alliances being updated and new ones being established (Kolosov & O'Loughlin, 1998). The area between the Soviet frontiers and the former "Iron Curtain" started gravitating towards the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, while the "buffer zone" between Europe and Russia was shifted eastwards towards the Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic States. In these conditions, the former "Eastern Europe" continued to be erroneously considered a homogeneous geographical category, called now *Middle Europe* (Fourcher, 1993), or the *New Europe*, a geostrategic space of transition between the East and the West (Brunet & Rey, 1996), or hostile to Russia's geopolitical interests (Dughin, 1997).

In some Anglo-American works, Romania remained attached to Eastern Europe (*Geographica, En-*

*cyclopaedia & World Atlas*, editor Cheers 1999, 2008; Turnock, 2001; Dawson & Fawn, 2002). According to the *United Nations Statistics Division* (2017), Eastern Europe includes such states as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Belarus and the Ukraine, as well as the European part of the Russian Federation<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, old conflict foci in the Balkans were rekindled, leading to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, and new ones appeared in the former Soviet space, due to ethnical tensions that were piling up throughout the second half of the 20th century. Europe was redefined, its bounds remaining uncertain. Thus, Europe is a term that combines geographical, historical and cultural elements, which all contribute to the European identity. Their experience is considered to be marked by the proximity of ideas, values and historical interactions which could not be pushed into a simple formula and remain subject to revision by each successive generation (*European Council*, 1992).

Within this context, the big territorial aggregates of Europe tend to being reshaped on the basis of historical antecedents (Lacoste et al., 1995; Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017).

The unification of Germany (1990) and the formation of the Visegrád Group (1991), followed by the dismemberment of Yugoslavia (1991-2006), laid the premisses for the formation of a new pan-German nucleus consisting of Germany, Austria and Switzerland to which part of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary were added, on the other hand, also Slovenia and Croatia; all these states self-identified themselves as Central-European. At the same time, including together Romania and Bulgaria in the European Union (January 1, 2007) led to the false impression that both countries belong to Balkan Europe. The same approach is seemingly made also by Germany, which ever since 1930 had an Institute at Regensburg for Eastern and South-Eastern Europe<sup>3</sup>, but which publishes studies covering a much wider area, including also Romania.

The Russian approach (Dughin, 1997 & 2011: 17) delimits Central Europe to Germany and to states succeeding the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Speaking of Romania, the author places it in the category of the "New Europe" countries<sup>4</sup>, actually a "sanitation barrier" used by Great Britain in the past to pre-

<sup>2</sup> The UN Statistics Division divides the Continent in Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Leibnitz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies.

<sup>4</sup> According to Al. Dughin, "New Europe" is formed of those East-European countries that tend to side on tough Rusophone adhering thus to the Euro-Atlantic trend, away from the present Continental tendencies of Old Europe (primarily France and Germany).

vent a possible Russian-German alliance which would have stopped English domination in the world. Thus, Romania's geopolitical choice is either on behalf of Continentalism, as a country of old European identity (an option implying a friendly policy towards Russia), or on behalf of Atlantism, hence playing the role of a "sanitation barrier" in favour of the United States.

The *World Economic and Geopolitic Yearbook* (1993), edited by the Center for International Studies and Research and the "Hérodote" review, provides an original view on "Latin Europe" which would include France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the ministates of Andorra, San Marino, Monaco and Vatican, while Romania, a Latin-language country, is placed among the

and the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), while Middle Europe consists of the eight already-mentioned states, together with Germany and Austria. A similar viewpoint expressed by Rey et al. (1998) which equates the Central European territories with the Middle Europe, including 10 states: Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania and, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) (Figure 6).

Last but not least, one must recall the cultural border. Ever since 1991, the Polish publicist K. Pomian launched the idea that Central Europe means that part of the European Continent populated by the majority Catholic and Protestant nations and which for



Figure 6. Central Europe according to V. Rey et al. (1998)

Balkan States, near Albania, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav states but less Greece, EU and NATO member before 1990 included beside Eastern Mediterranean, alongside Cyprus, Malta and Turkey. Hence, it is, not a geographical proximity, but former by belonging, during "Cold War", to the political-military alliance that came first in assigning the chosen regional background. Central Europe in this case is limited to the four states of the Visegrád Group: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The same approach is made also by other French authors, or of franco-phonetic orientation, like Castellán (1991), or Prevelakis (1994, 2001), the last including in the Balkan Peninsula Wallacia, Moldavia, Bukowina, Bessarabia and Transylvania (2001: 28-29).

By contrast, other French authors (Mauriel et al., 1997) extend the Central Europe area, including beside the states of the Visegrád Group, also Romania

decades, or centuries, were in territorial neighbourhood relations, co-habiting within the same political entities. This idea was taken over and subsequently evolved by the American political specialist S. Huntington, who considered that Central Europe includes those territories which had formerly made up Western Christianity; the old territories of the Habsburg Empire, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, together with Poland and the eastern borders of Germany, while the term Eastern Europe should be assigned to the regions developed under the aegis of the Orthodox Church: the Black Sea communities of Bulgaria and Romania, that detached themselves from the Ottoman rule only in the 19th century, and the European sections of the former Soviet Union (1997, 1998).

Unfortunately, an inconsistent approach regarding Romania's geographical position is found in recent works appeared in this country. Thus, at the time

of the Soviet political-ideological influence, the approach to the inter-war period viewed Romania in most works as part of Central Europe. Even at the beginning of the Geographical Monograph of the Popular Republic of Romania (1960), another comprehensive work aimed at highlighting the socio-economic changes brought about by the implementation of the communist policies under the direct guidance of the Soviet Union, geographer M. Iancu said that the Romanian Popular Republic lies in South-Eastern Europe (vol. I: 11). For all that, after the lapse of more than two decades, another fundamental work of Romanian geography, the *Geography of Romania* treatise (5 vol.) changes the country's geographical localisation, affirming that Romania lies in the South-East of Central Europe, at the contact with Eastern Europe and Balkan Europe (vol. I, 1983: 21), a localisation found also in the *Geographical Encyclopaedia of Romania* (1982: 11).

The same confusions occur even after 1989. While comprehensive collective works e.g. *Romania – Historical-Geographical Atlas* (1996, 2007), *Romania – Space, Society* (2005, 2006), *Romania – Nature and Society* (2016), or works focussed on Romania's geography and geopolitics (Alexandrescu, Deică, 2002; Săgeată, 2002, 2009; Erdeli, Cucu, 2005; Iordan, 2006; Simileanu, Săgeată, 2009; Simileanu, 2016 etc.) place this country in the South-Eastern part of Central Europe; or in Middle Europe (Popa, 1997), in Central-Eastern Europe (Rey et al., 2000, 2006; Căndea, Bran, 2001), others (Neguț et al., 2004) avoid a downright position, presenting merely various opinions, or even worse, placing it erroneously in South-Eastern Europe (Ghinea, 1996), or in Eastern Europe (Popescu, 2008).

The Romanian Academy also has an Institute of South-East European Studies<sup>5</sup>, set up in its current structure in 1963, which puts out a review on studies referring to the Balkan space and the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea; studies also deal with Romania's relations with the countries situated in these areas.

Romania's position of interference location is underlined by Nimigeanu (2001: 18) who says that physical-geographically Romania stands at the interference of three European provinces: "beginning with the low plain alongside the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, continuing with the low-mountains and tablelands and ending up with the tall mountains – the Alps and the Carpathians"; Erdeli and Cucu (2005: 43) view that, Romania's space fully corresponds, geographical-

ly and geologically, to the characteristics of Central Europe, but according to historically-attested functions, the Romanian territory lies in a transitional zone both to the east, to the west and the south at the interference between peninsular and continental Europe. Synthetising these dilemmas, worth-mentioning is also historian. Mureșan's viewpoint (1996) whereby Central Europe is a confessional notion which does not cover a rigorously defined content whether geographical, political or cultural.

Within this context, the present study aims to contribute to removing the confusions regarding Romania's geographical position, arguing the localisation of this state in the south-eastern part of Central Europe and explaining the historical and geopolitical circumstances that led to the fluctuation of its geographical position.

### Romania's geographical make-up. From cultural unity to inculcating the idea of "border state"

Romania's formation as a national state covers several successive stages: 1859, the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia Principalities (called Romania since 1866); 1878, when, in the wake of the Russian-Turkish War, it became independent from the Ottoman Empire and united with Dobruja<sup>6</sup>; 1913, the Second Balkan War led to the integration of Southern Dobruja – Cadrilaterul (the Quadrilateral)<sup>7</sup> and 1918, when the First World War led to the unification of Bessarabia and Bukovina with Romania<sup>8</sup> (on March 27, and November 28, respectively) and with Transylvania<sup>9</sup> (the "Greater Union" on the 1st of December). These regions, resulted from the dismemberment of some multinational empires that had belonged to three distinct European macroregions: central – Transylvania and Bukovina part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; southern – Dobrogea, part of the Ottoman Empire; and eastern – Bessarabia, part of the Tzarist Empire. Hence, Turner's idea (1920) of "border state", subsequently taken over by Huntington (1996, 1998) after the fall of the Iron Curtain, he situating the Carpathian Mts. alongside the cultural border between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. According to Huntington, Europe ends

<sup>6</sup> In exchange for Dobruja, Romania had to cede Russia southern Bessarabia (Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail counties) which it had obtained after the Crimean War (1856).

<sup>7</sup> This territory had belonged to the Romanian Kingdom until 1940, when, under the Craiova Treaty (7th September), German political pressure on the Romanian Government obliged it, in the circumstances of the Second World War, to cede it to Bulgaria.

<sup>8</sup> Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina had been part of the Romanian Kingdom until 1940, when in a Second Ultimatum Note (June 27) under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23, 1939, these territories were occupied by the Soviet Union.

<sup>9</sup> Including Transylvania proper (Ardeal), Banat, Crișana and Maramureș.

<sup>5</sup> This Institute is the rightful successor of the homonymous one founded by Iorga in collaboration with Murgoci and Pârvan in 1914 and of the Institute for Balkan Research set up by Papacostea in 1937; both were closed by the communist regime in 1948.



where Western Christianity ends and Islamism and Orthodoxism begin (1998: 232). On the line of this approach, Dingsdale (1999) placed Moldavia, Wallachia and Oltenia within the “East-European civilisation”; the West Plain (Oradea-Timișoara alignment) within the “West-European civilisation; Transylvania represented the “transition between” the West-European and the East-European civilisation”; Jordan (2005) put the boundary between Catholic Central Europe (Mitteleuropa) and Orthodox South-Eastern Europe (Südosteuropa), alongside the Carpathian line<sup>10</sup>. Hardi (2016: 140) underlined: “Romania is actually situated on the border of three macro-regions, and some of its territories show similarities to the latter”. But *in Transylvania, Catholicism was forcefully imposed through the measures taken by the popes and the Hungarian kings, the main political force in the region until 1918*.

Thus, simultaneously with the Hungarian state under King Stephen the Saint (997-1038), who adopted Western Christianity, the old Orthodox churches of Transylvania were replaced by Catholic ones, a move that grew into a state policy. Thus, the Hungarian kings of the Arpad Dynasty (9th cent.-1301) became the defenders of the Catholic bishoprics, monasteries and parishes from Hungary and Transylvania, while much of the lands that belonged to the Romanian communities became royal property, constituting the so-called “domain of the Crown” (Pop, 1996). In parallel with the political conquest, the Hungarian political authorities tried to assimilate the Romanian archaic communities spiritually with the help of the Catholic orders (Dominican, Franciscan, etc.). The failure of this policy to impose Catholicism forcefully in Transylvania resulted in the Province lending its support to the Protestant coalition against the Catholic one during the Thirty-Year War (1618-1648) (Pascu, 1972). After the Battle of Mohács (1526), Transylvania became an autonomous Principality under Ottoman suzerainty.

The second Catholic expansion in Transylvania occurred once the Province fell under Austrian influence (in 1688 *de facto* and in 1699 *de jure*), gaining international recognition (under the Karlovitz Treaty) once the ratio of military forces in the centre of Europe kept changing<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the Leopold Diploma of December 4, 1691 warranted the rights of four religions (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Unitarian), as well as privileges for the Saxons and Szeklers, whereas the Romanians and their Orthodox Church had ethnicity and tolerated church status (Pop, 1994).

If, in the beginning, the Vienna Court pretended to manifest religious tolerance, the Habsburgs would soon show their intention of interfering in the confessional picture of Transylvania. As early as 1692, Emperor Leopold I promised the Orthodox priests who accepted unification with the Church of Rome, a number of privileges similar to those of the Catholic clergy. On Jesuitical advice, the Vienna Emperor hoped to change the ratio of confessional forces, then thoroughly favourable to the Orthodox believers. Promises and political pressure did attract part of the Orthodox priests and believers to the Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the Graeco-Catholic Church (1698-1699)<sup>12</sup>. The Romanian majority opposed the forceful imposition of Catholicism, numerous attempts being made to return the Orthodoxism: in 1711, 1744 (June 6th, under Inocenție Micu), 1798, 1848 (May 3-15, the National Assembly at Blaj), 1907 (by the voice of Onisifor Ghibu) and 1918 (the Great National Assembly at Alba Iulia) (Giurescu, 1967). As a matter of fact, adopting Catholicism took place particularly in the central and north-east of Transylvania, the area mostly subjected to colonisation of and political pressure from the Habsburg rulers, while the south of Transylvania, Crișana, Banat and Bukowina<sup>13</sup> continued to have a majority Orthodox population, confirmed also by the 1930 population census (Table 1). Since in 1918 the regions passed under Romanian administration, the share of Orthodoxism grew significantly (Baroiu et al., 2005), so that after the lapse of 80 years of Romanian administration, the last census (20 October 2011) showed an absolute Orthodox population majority in all the Romanian Intracarpethian provinces: 83.9% of Bukowina’s total population, 74.7% in Maramureș, 72.7% in the Romanian part of Banat, 69.1% in Transylvania<sup>14</sup> and 51.3% in Crișana (Table 2).

Yet, outside the borders of a united Romania, important communities of a Romanian population did remain. According to the then statistics, 23,760 Romanians lived in Hungary (at 1920 Census), 67,897 in Western Banat (at 1921 Census<sup>15</sup>); 145,028 in Krajina; 36 463 in the Timok area; 9,585 in North Macedonia and 8,558 in the rest of former Yugoslavia (1921 Census); 33,226 in the Danubian regions of Bulgaria (1910 Census) and 5,324 Bulgarian MacedoRomanians; 244,305 Romanians in Greece and 32,948 in Albania<sup>16</sup> (*Romanians from abroad*, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> The Romanian Church United with Rome.

<sup>13</sup> Bukowina had belonged first to the Habsburg Monarchy, then to the Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Empire (1775-1918).

<sup>14</sup> Only two counties (Harghita and Covasna) have a majority Szekler population, the Orthodox being in the minority.

<sup>15</sup> 75 789 Romanians (at 1910 Census).

<sup>16</sup> Estimates made by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1931.

<sup>10</sup> Abb. 5: *Großgliederung Europas nach kulturräumlichen Kriterien und ohne Berücksichtigung heutiger Staatsgrenzen*.

<sup>11</sup> The failure of the second siege on Vienna (1683) marked the end of the Ottoman power in Central Europe.

**Table 1.** The ethnical structure of counties in the Romanian historical regions that had belonged to Austro-Hungary (1930, Dec. 29 Census) (% of total population)

County	Historical region	Total population (inh.)	Orthodox (%)	Greek-Catholics (%)	Roman-Catholics (%)	Reformed (%)	Evangelical-lutheran (%)	Other confessions (%)
Alba	Transylvania	212,749	<b>51.0</b>	31.6	3.4	7.5	3.3	3.2
Arad	Banat-Crişana	423,824	<b>55.4</b>	4.2	26.5	5.5	3.2	4.8
Bihor	Crişana	510,318	<b>49.8</b>	10.7	10.4	21.0	0.3	7.8
Braşov	Transylvania	168,125	<b>48.8</b>	2.4	9.9	7.6	27.8	3.5
Caraş	Banat	200,939	<b>70.3</b>	5.1	21.5	0.6	0.5	2.0
Câmpulung	Bukowina	94,815	<b>68.2</b>	0.8	16.9	-	5.5	8.6
Cernăuţi*	Bukowina	305,097	<b>67.0</b>	3.7	10.0	-	1.7	17.6
Ciuc	Transylvania	145,806	1.3	13.8	<b>81.3</b>	1.3	0.2	2.1
Cluj	Transylvania	334,991	19.3	<b>42.7</b>	8.6	21.7	0.8	6.9
Făgăraş	Transylvania	86,039	<b>55.2</b>	25.7	1.9	2.9	12.9	1.4
Hunedoara	Transylvania	332,118	<b>64.2</b>	18.5	9.1	4.5	1.0	2.7
Maramureş	Maramureş	161,575	5.3	<b>64.4</b>	6.4	1.8	-	22.1
Mureş	Transylvania	289,546	14.5	<b>32.4</b>	12.1	30.3	3.9	6.9
Năsăud	Transylvania	144,131	13.8	<b>60.2</b>	2.3	3.6	15.5	4.6
Odorhei	Transylvania	130,282	3.7	1.1	<b>34.6</b>	37.4	0.8	22.4
Rădăuţi	Bukowina	160,778	<b>70.6</b>	1.3	16.2	0.3	2.6	9.0
Satu Mare	Maramureş	294,875	4.4	<b>59.0</b>	12.6	15.0	0.2	8.8
Sălaj	Transylvania	343,347	4.9	<b>52.6</b>	12.2	25.4	0.3	4.6
Severin	Banat	239,586	<b>75.4</b>	3.9	14.9	3.1	0.5	2.2
Sibiu	Transylvania	194,619	<b>52.0</b>	12.7	4.0	2.2	27.8	1.3
Someş	Transylvania	219,355	15.0	<b>63.5</b>	3.2	12.8	0.1	5.4
Storojinet*	Bukowina	169,894	<b>78.1</b>	1.9	9.1	-	1.2	9.7
Suceava	Bukowina	121,327	<b>80.1</b>	1.4	8.4	-	3.3	6.8
Târnava Mare	Transylvania	147,994	36.6	10.4	4.5	6.2	39.2	3.1
Târnava Mică	Transylvania	149,482	16.6	<b>40.7</b>	4.6	16.6	16.2	5.3
Timiş-Torontal	Banat	499,443	41.1	2.8	<b>48.6</b>	2.5	2.4	2.6
Trei Scaune	Transylvania	136,122	14.6	2.3	36.1	<b>40.6</b>	0.8	5.6
Turda	Transylvania	183,282	33.1	<b>42.3</b>	4.1	14.4	0.1	6.0

\* Counties that are no longer in the current border of Romania. The proportion of the majority ethnicity is written in bold characters.

On the other side of the Carpathians, Moldavia and Wallachia where increasingly more leaning towards Russia, hoping to be liberated from under the Ottoman domination; the Turks' distrust in the boyars' native regime led to replacing it by governors of Greek origin loyal to the Porte<sup>17</sup>. They set up a central-based regime with a two-fold purpose: to maintain the Romanian Countries under Ottoman domination and to better integrate them into the Turkish economic system in order to supply the Porte and the Janissaries armies (Panaite, 1997). However, the obligations to the Porte of the two Romanian Countries were limit-

ed only to economic matters, since the Ottoman Empire was experiencing a deep-going economic crisis<sup>18</sup> (Kinross, 1977), but it did not affect the Romanian traditional cultural institutions in any way.

Therefore, no cultural limit to separate Transylvania from the Extracarpethian Romanian regions had existed, or does exist. In Transylvania, Western Christianity was imposed through systematic policies to convert the Romanian autochthonous population by Catholic and Protestant colonisations of Hungarian origin (known by the name of Szeklers in eastern Transylvania), Germans (named Saxons in the south and north of the Province, and Swabians in Banat) loyal to the

<sup>17</sup> They originated from the Phanar District of Constantinople, the political regime in power being named Phanariot (1711-1821 in Moldavia and 1715-1821 in Wallachia).

<sup>18</sup> Agricultural regions are depopulated becoming waste land and the Porte's permanent wars required huge expenses.

**Table 2.** The ethnical structure of counties in the Romanian historical regions that had belonged to Austro-Hungary (2011, Oct. 20 Census) (% of total population)

County	Historical region	Total population (inh.)	Orthodox (%)	Greek-Catholics (%)	Roman-Catholics (%)	Reformed (%)	Evangelical-lutheran (%)	Other confessions (%)
Alba	Transylvania	342,376	<b>82.3</b>	2.71	1.0	3.2	0.1	10.69
Arad	Banat-Crişana	430,629	<b>69.3</b>	9.91	8.27	2.27	0.78	9.47
Bihor	Crişana	575,398	<b>55.8</b>	2.12	8.4	16.6	0.5	16.58
Bistriţa-Năsăud	Transylvania	286,225	<b>79.2</b>	1.84	1.1	4.1	0.9	12.86
Braşov	Transylvania	549,217	<b>79.9</b>	0.62	3.24	2.1	1.89	12.25
Caraş-Severin	Banat	295,579	<b>76.5</b>	0.61	5.6	0.32	0.01	16.96
Cluj	Transylvania	691,106	<b>68.4</b>	3.35	3.27	10.6	0.07	14.31
Covasna	Transylvania	210,177	20.7	0.11	<b>35.1</b>	32.2	0.4	11.49
Harghita	Transylvania	310,867	12.11	0.16	<b>64.5</b>	11.8	0.05	11.39
Hunedoara	Transylvania	418,565	<b>80.7</b>	0.86	3.67	1.85	0.03	12.89
Maramureş	Maramureş	478,659	<b>74.7</b>	4.56	4.75	3.39	0.02	12.58
Mureş	Transylvania	550,846	<b>51.0</b>	2.01	8.81	25.1	0.13	12.95
Satu Mare	Maramureş	344,360	<b>46.7</b>	7.13	17.3	17.5	0.03	11.34
Sălaj	Transylvania	224,384	<b>61.5</b>	2.55	2.37	18.78	-	14.8
Sibiu	Transylvania	397,322	<b>83.95</b>	1.91	1.25	1.46	0.48	10.95
Suceava	Bukowina	634,810	<b>89.93</b>	0.18	1.11	0.02	-	8.14
Timiş	Banat	683,540	<b>74.25</b>	1.21	7.98	1.37	0.05	14.69

The proportion of the majority ethnicity is written in bold characters.

Hungarian and Austrian authorities, assigned to defend the pre-1918 borders (Creţan, 2016a).

### Romania's geographical position and the elements defining it: the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea

Romania lies at the crossroads of parallel 40°N latitude and 25°E longitude. This geographical position has three major co-ordinates that have stamped its historical and geopolitical destiny: the Carpathian Mts., the Danube River and the Black Sea. *The Carpathians*, relative low-altitude mountains, with lots of depressions and valleys crossing them, proved favourable to settlement. From oldest times they have been much inhabited, being together with the Transylvanian Depression, the formation core of the Romanian people (Conea, 1941, 1942, 1967). Two-thirds of the whole Carpathian Chain stretch out on Romanian territory, the Romanian Carpathians, together with the Subcarpathians and the hilly Depression of Transylvania covering 107,741 km<sup>2</sup>, that is, 45.2% of all of the country's surface-area (Posea, Badea, 1984), and concentrating about 40% of its population. *The Danube* is not only a river that collects the whole inland drainage network of Romania, but also Europe's main navigable waterway, connecting Central Europe to the Black Sea basin, while the Danube-Main-Rhine and the Danube-Black Sea canal system constitute a true transcontinental navigable axis that links

Constanţa harbour to the North Sea (Rotterdam). Its particular importance for Romania derives also from the fact that its territory is crossed by the Lower Danube sector (1,075 km, 38% of its total length), basically the most important section in terms of flow and navigation (Creţan, Vesalon, 2017 & Văran, Creţan, 2018). Thus, as early as the Middle Ages, the Moldavian and the Wallachian rulers, succeeded in attracting the interest of King Napoleon the Third and of Queen Victoria, who used to call them "Danubian Princes", who supported the unification of all the territories inhabited by Romanians, into a powerful state at the mouths of the Danube, successfully capable of coping with the Russian expansion to the Bosphorus and the Dardaneles (Cazacu, 1999). The third specific element of Romania's geographical position is *the Black Sea*, which is an open gate for navigation towards the whole Planetary Ocean. The downfall of the Iron Curtain and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union increased the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea perceived as a "gateway" to the huge hydrocarbon resources of the Caucasus and the Caspian basin.

These three elements place Romania in Central Europe, a situation confirmed by the approximately equal distances to the northern, eastern and western ends of the Continent: the North Cape, 2,800 km, the Ural Mts, 2,600 km, Cape Roca, 2,700 km, but closer to the Mediterranean Sea (Matapan Cape), 1,050 km (*The Geography of Romania*, I, 1983). Thus, the Roma-

nian territory is a *place of contact and interference* in relation with the four big climatic and biogeographical realms specific to the extremities of the Continent: Western, Oceanic Europe, the influence of which is seen in the penetration of oceanic air masses, very frequent in the Banat-Crișana Plain and on the western slope of the Apuseni Mts.; Eastern Europe, featuring a temperate-continental climate often with excessive shades in the Moldavian Tableland and the Bărăgan Plain; Southern Europe, Balkan Europe is influenced by dryness throughout the southern part of Romania, affecting characteristic flora and fauna species (the Banat Mts., Cerna and Mehedinți Mts., South Dobrogea) and northern Scandinavian-Baltic Europe, the influences of which are much reduced in the Ukraine Forested Carpathians; nevertheless, they are frequently felt on the Suceava Plateau, *which is another argument, also of the natural background, for situating Romania in Central Europe.*

In addition, one should remember the country's geo-economic position, Romania lying for centuries at the crossroads of the major traffic axes between Western Europe, the former Soviet space, Asia Minor and the Near East (Crețan, 2006b). At the same time, the country lies at the intersection of some transversal geo-economic axes on the way of being strengthened (the Caspian Sea – Black Sea – Mediterranean Sea) and the axis of rivers and channels (Rhine – Main – Danube) (Neguț et al., 2004).

## Conclusions

### Central European states

*Geographical, mathematical, topographic and, last but not least, cultural and economic arguments place Romania in the south-east of Central Europe, a reality affirmed both in the interwar period and in recent prestigious scientific works. For example, Gottman (1952) viewed Romania as a link-country between Central Europe and the Balkans (quoted by Alexandrescu, Deică, 2002); in its 2010 edition, the British Universal Encyclopaedia defined it as follows: a state situated in the south-east of Central Europe (vol. 13: 228). Political circumstances lie behind placing Romania either in Eastern Europe, in South-Eastern Europe, or in the Balkans, or again in a hypothetical Middle Europe, all these being actually conjunctural regional aggregates built up according to political criteria, without any well-defined boundaries. An even greater geographical error is the fact that some authors, starting from the political situation prior to 1918, and by virtue of false cultural criteria, place only Transylvania within Central Europe (or in a wider acceptance, all the Romanian Intracarpathian regions), thereby argument-*

### Romania and Europe's geographical centre

Various criteria revendicating Europe's geographical Centre are put forward by eleven sites from nine states: Germany, Poland (two sites each), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Hungary (Figure 7). Although Romania is not mentioned among these states, yet two localities of the so-called Continental Centre exist in the proximity of its borders, e.g. Dilove in the Ukraine and Tállya in Hungary.

Dilove lies near Rahiv Town in Ukraine's Zakarpattia Region, on the upper course of the Tisza River, in the frontier area of four states: Ukraine, Romania, Poland and Slovakia. This village stands in the close vicinity of Romania's borders, only 2 km away from the Romanian Valea Vișeului Village. In 1887, it was established as Europe's geographical Centre by geographers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire<sup>19</sup>. In its turn, Tállya Village, situated in the north-east of Hungary, was designated, by topographical measurements, as geodesic centre of Continental Europe<sup>20</sup>. The location of these two settlements close to the borders of Romania attest, mathematically and topographically, that this country lies in Central Europe.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/ukraine/rakhiv/attractions/geographical-centre-of-europe/a/poi-sig/1383331/360939>

<sup>20</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20130925182215/http://www.tort-enelmi-borut.hu/tallyagr.html>

ing, on revisionistic geopolitical tendencies, of the secession of these historical regions.

According to the author, the process of integration of the Central and East-European states into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures has created the premises for reanalysing the bounds of the big regional aggregates of the Continent by an eastwards extension of Central Europe (Table 3) in the light of geographical realities and inclusion of the following states into this territorial aggregate: Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland (which form Central-Western Europe); Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Letonia, Estonia and the Russian region Kaliningrad (constituting Central-Eastern Europe) (Figure 7).

Tracing the eastern border of NATO and the EU again changed this river into a fragmentation axis<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This role was also at the time of the Cold War, when Romania, though part of the USSR political-military and economical alliances, yet political reasons led to the small border traffic between the two countries going on with difficulty.



Figure 7. Central Europe according to the author

Table 3. Regional assemblies of Europe

European Regions		Component States / Regions
Northern Europe		Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden Greenland / Kalaallit Nunaat, Føroyar / Faeroes, Svalbard
Central Europe	Central-Western	Austria, Czech Rep., Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland
	Central-Eastern	Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova Rep., Romania, Russia (Kaliningrad), Ukraine
Southern Europe	South-Western	Andorra, Italy, Malta, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Vatican Balearic Isl., Gibraltar
	South-Eastern	Balkan Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia Rep., Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Turkey (European Part)
Western Europe		Andorra, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Ireland, Monaco, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Balearic I., Gibraltar, Channel I., Man I.
Eastern Europe		Russian Federation (European Part)

imposed by the necessity of securing the Eastern border of two Western alliances against the illegal migratory flows and of organised crime that might enter the Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. However, this fragmentation axis runs contrary to the normal historical vocation of this River, namely of integration, since the some ethnical block, the Romanian one (Marcu, 2009 & Săgeată, 2011) lives on both its banks. This contradiction explains the particularities of this sector of NATO and EU eastern border which requires a certain type of administration.

Its south-Danubian neighbour is Balkan Europe (including Bulgaria, Greece, Albania and the states

of former Yugoslavia), a component part of Southern Europe (in which we find also Italy, the island-states of the Mediterranean Sea and the Iberian States). Eastern Europe consists of the European part of the Russian Federation; Northern Europe with the Scandinavian States, Denmark and Iceland, while Western Europe englobes the France, the Benelux States, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

By this proposal to regionalise the European Continent, the author suggests a new approach to this topic, based on objective criteria and realities, this work contributing to removing some unclarities and confusions and implicitly to the progress of research in this area.

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