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Religion and Politics in Romania: From Public Affairs to Church-State Relations

Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu

Introduction

In November 2010, Romanian legislator Liviu Campanu, representing the governing coalition, proposed Daniel Ciobotea as Prime Minister of a cabinet of “national union.” The suggestion was surprising because Ciobotea is leader of the Orthodox Church, accounting for 86.8% of the country’s population (International Religious Freedom Report, 2009). It would not be the first time when the Orthodox Patriarch assumed such a political role - Miron Cristea headed the government from 1938 to 1939. While Ciobotea quietly ignored it, the proposal reflected not only deep dissatisfaction with the government, but also the respect the Orthodox Church enjoys among Romanians. The Church remains the most trusted institution in a country where religiosity registers high levels (Dumitru, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Taking this proposal as a starting point, this article surveys the way in which the Orthodox Church has shaped Romania’s democratization during the last 20 years. It will first briefly present the Church’s position during communist times, and then discuss its involvement in public affairs by looking at its impact on elections, public education, and the legalization of homosexual behavior. Then, the article presents four divergent models of church-state relations that have been put forward since 1990 by the dominant Orthodox Church, the religious minorities, the Romanian political elite, and some humanistic (read: atheistic) civil society groups. Our contention is that, from 1989, the year marking the collapse of the communist regime, until his death in 2007, the Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist pursued an established church model that sought legal privileges and state recognition for his Church. Since 2007, under Patriarch Daniel, the Church has opted for a partnership with the state in the promotion of social welfare.

Church-State Relations before 1989

Since its early days, the Romanian Orthodox Church has pursued a policy of accommodation with the rulers of the day and silent submission to them (Patapievici, 1999; Stan & Turcescu, 2000; Stan & Turcescu, 2007). For a long time, the Church was in no position to do better, as it was subordinated to a foreign patriarch, had the revenues obtained from its vast lands directed abroad, and a hierarchy filled by poorly educated clergy (Ursul, 1982). In the 19th century, the Church emerged as a self-governing patriarchate in the Orthodox world. At the same time, it was brought under regular government control, thus succumbing to the politics of the day and losing any autonomous decision-making power in areas ranging from control over monastic revenues to the nomination of its head.
When national consciousness emerged in Eastern Europe, the Church joined the bandwagon by positioning itself as pivotal for Romanian identity (Gillet, 1995; Stan & Turcescu, 2006; Stan & Turcescu, 2007; Webster, 1995). In doing so, it borrowed and then monopolized the Transylvanian Greek Catholics' nationalist discourse centered on the Latin character of the Romanian language and descent. This gave the Orthodox Church growing moral and political legitimacy in the eyes of the Romanians, and more recognition from the state. Before 1945, the constitution recognized the Orthodox Church as the national church, a privileged position which still fell short of full autonomy from the secular power.

Once Romania turned communist, the Communist Party regarded religion as a capitalist remnant expected to wither away as its social basis disappeared, but recognized that a Church respected by the population could help to further the party's socioeconomic and political goals. Under communism, church and state established a modus vivendi which allowed the Church to be enlisted as an unconditional supporter of communist policies in return for the government's toleration of ecclesiastical activity. Until 1965, the communists aimed to weaken the Church's social role and to bring its hierarchy under control by legally depriving the Church of its privileged position among religious denominations and its right to pursue educational and charitable activities.

In 1948, the party appointed as patriarch Iustinian Marina, a former parish priest with socialist political views. At a time when the Communist Party engaged in widespread repression in an effort to consolidate its power, Iustinian obtained some concessions for his Church. After 1965, the state no longer closed monasteries, rehabilitated imprisoned clergy, and supported the restoration of churches of historical importance. But Iustinian's death in 1977 coincided with the onset of a new anti-church campaign. The communists handpicked the subsequent patriarchs, known as the Red Patriarchs. Shortly after his appointment, Patriarch Iustin Moisescu praised Nicolae Ceausescu for "securing complete freedom to all denominations in our country to carry out their activity among the faithful" (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,469), thus blatantly disregarding church persecution by the state. His successor, Teoctist Arapasu, was a political activist long before becoming patriarch. By 1979 religious persecution was on the rise again, and the Ceausescu regime continued its anti-religious policies unabated until 1989. From 1977 to 1989, 22 churches were demolished in Bucharest, and 14 others were closed down or moved to disadvantageous sites (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,470).

After the fall of Ceausescu, the Church and Patriarch Teoctist were strongly criticized for supporting the communist regime to its very end. In January 1990, the Synod apologized for those "who did not always have the courage of the martyrs," and expressed regret that it had been "necessary to pay the tribute of obligatory and artificial praises addressed to the dictator" (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,470). Faced with increased criticism, Teoctist resigned his office in January 1990, only to return three months later. The Church's collective leadership, the Synod, opted for continuity in the face of political change and acknowledged the views of the other Orthodox Churches, which went on recognizing Teoctist as patriarch.

Since 1989, the Orthodox Church as an institution has avoided any moral self-examination and never openly admitted to willingly collaborating with the communist authorities or the dreaded Securitate (Balogh, 2008; Stan & Turcescu, 2005a). So far, Orthodox clergy accused of having served the communist regime have kept silent on the
subject. Orthodox theologians justified collaboration by resorting to the Byzantine concept of symphonia, cooperation between church and state in the fulfillment of their goals, each supporting the other and none being subordinated to the other. The concept binds the state and the church so closely together that the latter becomes a state church, while other religions enjoy considerably fewer rights. This view sharply contrasts to the Western notion of a separation between church and state, which implies the independence and sufficiency of the ecclesiastical and political hierarchies. To accommodate a hostile atheistic state, the Romanian symphonia entailed major compromises on the part of the church. Compared to other religious denominations the Orthodox Church had a privileged position, but continued to be only a privileged servant of the state.

Did collaboration with the communists really help the Orthodox Church? Orthodox leaders and theologians have claimed that their political submission helped avoid a more dreadful alternative: obliteration. The Church not only admirably evaded the fate of the local Roman and Greek Catholic Churches, which were subjected to vicious persecution and suppression, but by 1985 became the most vigorous Church in the communist bloc. For its anticipated loyalty and services to the communists, it was allowed to take possession of Greek Catholic property, and to keep open its seminaries and theological institutes. Yet collaboration with communist authorities failed to prevent church persecution entirely and entailed a church-state partnership which was no contract between equals, but a state-dominated marriage in which church leaders could seldom negotiate where the boundaries of religious activities and freedom were to be drawn. The Church became morally compromised in the eyes of many Romanian faithful and intellectuals, international church and ecumenical circles, and Western governments by its refusal to serve as a center of anti-communist opposition. Its support for the communist encroachment on human rights was strongly condemned by the Western world, a view shared by influential Bucharest intellectuals who deny the Church a positive role in Romania’s democratization.

The Church in Post-communist Times

The end of communism allowed the Church to function freely for the first time in decades, although its post-1989 presence was initially marred by the controversy surrounding the patriarchal office and its ambiguous relationship with the former communist regime. Shortly thereafter, however, the Church emerged as a powerful political actor and an uncontested source of moral strength, with opinion polls constantly ranking it the most popular institution in the country and with a vast majority of Romanians stating their full confidence in it.

Exactly how did this miraculous transformation take place remains subject to debate, but several explanations can be proposed. For many Orthodox Romanians, Teoctist's retreat to a monastery and the Synod’s partial apology amounted to a long-overdue mea culpa for the Church’s role under communism. With a handful of exceptions, Romanians were open to criticism regarding their compliance with the communist regime; as such, the average Romanian was willing to overlook the Church’s past political conformism without demanding further explanations. Its spectacular comeback was facilitated by Orthodox radio and television programs in which prominent theologians and clergy glossed over the Church’s dubious past performance to present it in a favorable light. The Church also capitalized on the political actors’ loss of popularity due to the hardships of
transition. Last, the Church skillfully used nationalism to restore its prestige and strike a chord with the Romanians. Its post-1989 discourse has underscored the link between Orthodoxy and Romanianism, and the importance of preserving the Romanian nation and identity in the face of growing modernization, globalization, secularization, and religious proselytism. Part of the nationalist drive was the 1992 Synod decision to canonize 19 Romanian saints and to declare the second Sunday after Pentecost as the “Sunday of the Romanian Saints.” The inclusion of historical political figures fostered confusion between saints and national heroes, the more so since some canonized rulers were known more for their intrigues and cruelty than their saintly Christian life (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 51).

The uneasy church-state cooperation continued after 1989, with both Church and state drawing hefty advantages from a partnership increasingly standing on a more equal footing. The Church obtained key concessions from political leaders, including both some autonomy from the state and access to state financial support, the introduction of religious education in public schools, and a regular presence on the state-controlled national television and radio. In turn, politicians have called on the Orthodox Church for gaining additional legitimacy, consolidating their power, rebuking accusations of communist nostalgia, and defining the limits of permissible Westernization.

The Church in Post-communist Public Affairs
Encouraged by the post-communist religious revival, the Church became a constant public voice and a strong advocate for religious solutions to various civil issues. Some of the issues it addressed during the last two decades include clergymen participation in electoral politics, the introduction of religion in public schools, and the anti-homosexuality campaign. Let us discuss each one of them in turn.

Electoral Politics
Post-communist elections and party politics have best illustrated the politicians’ readiness to take advantage of the Church, and the Church’s eagerness to reassert its political role. During electoral campaigns, candidates of all ideological persuasions wooed the Church to gain the votes of the country’s sizeable Orthodox community. By 1996, religion had moved to the forefront of electoral debates, compelling all contenders to define their position vis-a-vis the Church. The 1996 presidential candidates visited Orthodox churches, attended religious services, and were photographed surrounded by Orthodox icons. Some of them godfathered orphans and witnessed marriages in widely publicized ceremonies, and one candidate chose “He Who Votes Me, Votes God” as his electoral slogan (Stan & Turcescu, 2005b). The highlight of the presidential race was a televised debate in which the Christian-Democrat Emil Constantinescu surprised the incumbent Ion Iliescu, a self-declared atheist, by asking him whether he believed in God. Constantinescu won the office and became the first post-communist Romanian president to take his solemn oath, hands on the Bible, in the presence of the Orthodox patriarch.

Candidates for the 1996 local and parliamentary elections also sought Church support. The Transylvanian leaders of the then ruling Social Democrat Party asked the Church to urge believers to vote for their candidates. Religion remained salient in 1998, when contenders for the Bucharest mayoral office attended Orthodox religious services and received the unusual honor of being invited inside the altar sanctuary, where only
clergy and the king have traditionally entered. Religion also determined the outcome of the 2000 presidential elections. In the second round Corneliu Vadim Tudor, leader of the xenophobic Greater Romania Party, challenged Iliescu. When Iliescu was proclaimed victor, Tudor cried “fraud” and added that what he saw as the falsified electoral contest “ushered in the Anti-Christ” (Stan & Turcescu, 2001).

The Church in turn rushed to follow the pattern of subservience to the state with which it was historically accustomed. Days after Ceausescu was deposed, the Synod denounced the former “dictatorship” and iterated its support for the new rulers (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,473). Church leaders advised clergymen to refrain from political involvement and from joining political parties and influencing their parishioners' political options. The same stance was officially adopted during subsequent elections, but clergymen did not live up to the commitment of political neutrality and instead actively took part in political life. While clergy have taken sides in the continuous battle between the leftist and the pro-democratic political forces active on the Romanian post-communist political scene, the patriarchate showed willingness to endorse any of the two, as long as they were in power. Two decades after the fall of communism and several governments down the road, it is clear that the Church benefited from collaboration with both the Social Democrats, heirs to the former Communist Party, and their political rivals.

Religion in Public Schools

The resumption of pre-university religious education after decades of officially backed atheistic propaganda was one of the earliest post-communist demands of the Orthodox Church. In 1990, the new Minister of Religious Affairs Nicolae Stoicescu and the Synod stated their decision to encourage the introduction of religious education at all pre-university levels. The same demand was formulated by the Group of Reflection on Church Renewal, set up in an effort to craft a new image for the Church and do away with the conservatism of a hierarchy tainted by collaboration with the communists. An optional religion class, for which pupils were not to be graded, was to be included in the curricula of pre-university schools. A Synod-appointed mixed commission of clergymen and lay people was to select the basics to be taught in class. Defending the proposal, Minister Stoicescu argued that religious education would contribute to the moral recovery of the nation, and Ciobotea (then Metropolitan of Moldova) explained that religious education was needed because “atheistic humanism cannot be replaced by a nihilist, indifferent and confused humanism” (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,477). The request was met with mixed feelings outside Orthodox circles. Some intellectuals opposed the idea of compulsory religious education altogether, while others criticized the poor quality of religious instruction and of related literature.

The 1995 Law on Education made religion classes compulsory only in elementary schools. But the Church benefited from the legislators' oversight to make room for a non-religious or philosophical alternative. Financial constraints and lack of specialized teachers have meant that elementary schools offer religion classes mostly taught by Orthodox teachers. While this shortcoming ran counter to the non-Orthodox parents' right to provide their children with education constant with their beliefs, it allowed the Orthodox Church to make its doctrine, history, and worldview known to a larger audience. The high school level has faced the same practical constraints, but high school students can refuse to take the weekly religion class, even if this means no religious instruction at all.
While the study of Orthodoxy failed to spark interest among young members of the country's dominant religious community, Protestant and Catholic religion classes have been popular with ethnic Hungarian and German students.

Church involvement in education further included calls for revising textbooks in consonance with Christian values. In 1990, the Group of Reflection on Church Renewal asked for the “de-Marxization” of textbooks so as to adequately reflect the contribution of Orthodoxy to Romanian culture. In 1993, Metropolitan of Transylvania Antonie Pla-madeala asked parliament to adopt educational programs and literature based on fundamental Christian values and ideals. His position was echoed in 1998 by Ioan Moisin, a Greek Catholic priest, who asked the Ministry of Education to revise philosophy and biology textbooks to avoid contradictions with creationism. Moisin complained that pupils were told by their religion teacher that humans are God's creation and by the philosophy and biology teachers of Darwinist persuasion that humans descend from the ape (Stan & Turcescu, 2005c). Parliament and the Ministry of Education did not consider the proposals, but in 2006 Romania became the first European country where evolutionism is no longer taught in high schools (Bird, 2008; Darwin, exclus din manualele de biologie?, 2007). At the same time, Voltaire, Camus, and Nietzsche were excluded from philosophy textbooks because of their position critical toward religion. The Orthodox Church argues that the move meant nothing, since the curriculum still includes evolutionist ideas, although religion textbooks present creationism as absolute truth, denigrate evolutionism, and reflect literalist creationism. In 1998, as many as 73% of students aged 13 to 19 believed that man is God's creation (Blagă, 2008).

The Campaign against Homosexual Behavior
When Romania formally applied for membership in the European structures in the early 1990s, Article 200 of its Criminal Code, punishing sexual relationships among persons of the same sex with prison terms of up to five years, came under heavy criticism. Under international pressure, the government initiated procedures to modify the Code in accordance with European standards, but it was only three years later that changes partially liberalizing homosexual activities came into effect. The new Article 200 read that homosexual activities were punishable with prison terms if they were carried out in public or if they caused public scandal. The article punished those “inciting or encouraging a person to practice sexual relations between persons of the same sex,” and those engaging in “propaganda or association or any other act of proselytism committed in the same scope” (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,479). While apparently more lenient than its predecessor, the new formulation did not specify what exactly constituted a “public scandal” and where should the fine line between “private” and “public” behavior be drawn. Some politicians believed that any homosexual act is public because “what is damaging and immoral on the streets cannot be permissible and moral in intimacy” (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,479), others justified their hesitation to fully decriminalize homosexuality by claiming that the Romanians regard homosexual relations as “abnormal.” Indeed, a 1993 opinion poll revealed that four out of five Romanians believed homosexual acts were never justified, and the eradication of homosexuality served a legitimate national interest (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 172).

In 1998, an international report singled out the Orthodox Church as a formidable opponent to decriminalizing homosexuality (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Patriarch
Teoctist repeatedly came out against “the acceptance of the degradingly abnormal and unnatural lifestyle as normal and legal” (Stan & Turcescu, 2005d, p. 295). Christian organizations sustained within the Synod the momentum for an anti-homosexuality crusade. After denouncing homosexuality as “propaganda for human degenerates,” the Orthodox students’ association persuaded Teoctist to ask legislators to maintain the ban on homosexuality, and mounted a tireless intimidation campaign against legislators willing to decriminalize such behavior, accusing them of atheism and immorality. In its fight, the Church used the state television to criticize the proposed changes to Article 200. Orthodox theologians, priests, and monks extolled the virtue of the traditional position on sexual relations and rejected any “Westernization” of Romanian mores. The most outspoken was Archbishop Anania, who remarked that “Europe asks us to accept sex, homosexuality, vices, drugs, abortions and genetic engineering, including cloning,” and came against the “impoverished Europe...built exclusively on politics and economics, lacking any trace of spirituality, culture or religion” (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 177).

In its fight against homosexuality, the Church won several politicians. The extremist Greater Romania Party, which looked upon Orthodoxy as quintessential for Romanian identity, proclaimed that toleration of homosexuality was damaging to national pride. Christian Democratic leader Corneliu Coposu opposed “sexual aberrations,” and argued that the party’s Christian moral foundation led it “to combat every deviation from the law of nature and from the moral principles of a future balanced society” (Stan & Turcescu, 2005d, p. 297). He further claimed it to be imperative for liberty not to be “blocked by the liberty of others when the collective sentiment of a group or a tradition is injured by some initiative pretending to be ‘progressive’ and modern” (Stan & Turcescu, 2005d, p. 297). The Christian Democrat deputy Emil Popescu even suggested that “incest was preferable to homosexuality since the former at least preserved the chance to procreation” (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 297).

In 1998, the government proposed to decriminalize homosexual behavior as part of a larger drive to harmonize Romanian and European Union (EU) legislation. But one deputy argued that “We want to enter Europe, not Sodom and Gomorrah” (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 174). The decriminalization took center stage after Romania started accession talks with the EU in March 2000, at a time when addressing the problem of discrimination against minority groups became a formal commitment for Romania to enter Europe. In June that year, deputies voted to decriminalize homosexuality and sent the changes to the Senate for examination. To quash the amendments, the Synod met ahead of the debate in the Senate, and asked the president not to sign the changes into law, should the Senate also decriminalize homosexuality. Local gay activists lobbied Parliament and petitioned Teoctist in a bid to temper the Orthodox clerics’ wrath. Ultimately, the international factor decided the fate of Article 200. When it became clear that the Romanian politicians would postpone eliminating Article 200 in the electoral year 2000, the Council of Europe threatened to restart monitoring Romania’s human rights record. Hours before the deadline, the Romanian Parliament passed the amendments (Stan & Turcescu, 2005d, p. 298).

Four Models of Church-State Relations

Until 2006, four models of church-state interaction were advocated as solutions compatible to democracy by the political elites, the Orthodox Church, the religious minorities, and the local civil society. Romania was the last country in the region to adopt a new Law
on Religion in 2006. Before that, the state upheld an outdated atheistic model and preached pluralism, while giving precedence to the dominant faith. Orthodox leaders expressed preference for the established church model, religious minorities embraced the pluralistic model, but the civil society was divided. Some groups favored a clear separation of church and state in public affairs, others advocated the established church model. Since this latter group’s arguments generally coincided with those of the Orthodox Church, we will present here only the strict separation model as formulated by the civil society groups. Let us reconstruct each of these models in turn.

**The Managed Quasi-Pluralist Model**

When it came to religion and politics, the Romanian post-communist political elites tried to find the middle ground between winning the electoral support of their mostly Orthodox constituencies, enjoying autonomy from religious groups in the policy-making process, and complying with the requirement of religious toleration imposed by EU accession. The process of negotiating between such competing goals turned proposals coming from political quarters into variants of the managed quasi-pluralist model by which the centralized state retained control over religious affairs through registration and fund allocation, while relaxing communist-era restrictions on religious activity and endorsing a privileged partnership with the Orthodox Church. Individual parties and politicians forged ties to different religious groups, but the state refused to formally elevate any denomination above all others. From the viewpoint of the authorities, religious groups formally belonged to the state-free areas of family, education, and the arts.

The 1991 constitution sounded a clearly pluralistic tone by guaranteeing freedom of thought, opinion, and religious beliefs when manifested in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect, allowing religions to be “free and organized in accordance with their own statutes,” and prohibiting “any forms, means, acts or actions of religious enmity” (Constitution of Romania, 1991). It further upheld the autonomy of religions from the state and pledged state support for religious assistance in the army, in hospitals, prisons, orphanages, and elderly care homes. Other laws expanded religious freedom. Priests and theology graduates were exempt from military training, and the ban on Roman Catholic orders and congregations on Romanian territory was annulled. In 1996, Easter and Christmas as celebrated by the Orthodox Church were listed among national holidays, while faithful of religious minorities were allowed to take alternative days off work (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 27).

At the same time, the mandate of the State Secretariat remained unchanged, thus signaling a desire of the post-communist state to retain its grip over religious activity. Through the secretariat, the government continued to require denominations to gain official recognition according to unspecified criteria that could be changed unilaterally. The religious groups registered by the communist regime retained their status, and the reconstituted Greek Catholic Church was recognized in late 1989. Afterward, only the Jehovah’s Witnesses gained official recognition because of intense pressure from the international community more than the government’s commitment to evenhandedness. Religious associations did not enjoy financial advantages, the right to build houses of worship or to perform rites of baptism, marriage, or burial, the guarantee of state noninterference in their activity, or protection against negative media campaigns.
The state continued to treat the Orthodox Church preferentially. Instead of reversing by law the communist-era transfer of Greek Catholic Church property to the Orthodox Church, authorities accepted the Orthodox view that the matter was a purely religious dispute that had to be settled without state interference (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, pp. 91-110). In addition, the Orthodox Church dominated the State Secretariat. After 1989, all but one secretary were graduates of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. Through the secretaries, the Orthodox Church influenced the distribution of government subsidies to religious groups, received financial support above its rightful share from special government funds, and delayed the adoption of a new law on religion. This is why until 2006 the communist law remained effective, but hardly appropriate for the new times, since it defined the relationship with a repressive state. State representatives continued to confirm nominations to senior positions in the Orthodox hierarchy and attend the synod sessions.

The Established Church Model
Although it dominated the country’s religious landscape and enjoyed the support of formations on all sides of the political spectrum, the Orthodox Church downplayed its privileged position and asked instead for additional benefits, as protection against the whims of future governments that might be less disposed in its favor. Church leaders upheld an established church model combining British, German, and Romanian historical elements, allowing it to receive government favoritism and to serve as part of both the state establishment and the civil society. With an eye to the Church of England and its established church status, the Romanian Church claimed the position of national church on the basis of its large membership, its historical contribution to nation-building, and the interwar precedent. For Orthodox clergymen, recognizing the church as the national church would set the clock back to the interwar period and redress communist injustices by granting the church its historical right and reflecting de jure a position that the church has occupied de facto after 1989. The church dominated numerically, and its political clout was unmatched by other groups. As such, they claimed, the legal changes would merely recognize the state of affairs rather than grant the church unwarranted additional privileges. Church leaders were disappointed that the 1923 constitution was not used as a blueprint for the 1991 basic law.

With an eye to the British Lords Spiritual, the 26 bishops of the established Anglican Church appointed to the House of Lords, the Romanian Orthodox Church demanded that leaders of officially recognized religions be accepted as lifetime senators. During the constitutional debates of 1990, the church asked authorities to appoint all synod members (the patriarch, metropolitans, and senior bishops) to the Senate. The idea was part and parcel of pre-communist constitutions. The 1923 basic law granted the same right to Greek Catholic leaders as well. In 1990 the Orthodox leaders met President Iliescu to discuss the Church’s representation in parliament (Stan & Turcescu, 2000, p. 1,476). The drafters of the constitution disregarded the suggestions, but church leaders did not give up on the proposal. In 1998 the church reissued the request, while in 1999 a group of legislators prepared a draft law allowing Orthodox leaders to become senators. Parliament did not discuss the draft.

The British model did pose a challenge to the Romanian Orthodox Church in assuming that the state granted no financial support to religious groups but expected them to raise funds for their activity through fees and donations. Thus, when it came to govern-
ment subsidies, the church turned to the German model and asked for the introduction of a state-collected church tax. Unless they pay a surcharge to their tax bill, German taxpayers do not have the right to be baptized, married, or buried in their church, and might find it difficult to gain access to hospitals. The Romanian Orthodox Church praised the German model for allowing religious groups to receive state financial support, while making the process less political.

The Pluralist Model
Recognized and unrecognized religious minorities criticized the draft law on religion as falling short of democratic requirements and insisted that only the pluralist model was appropriate for the country. According to them, Romania, as other predominantly Orthodox countries, never enjoyed a stable democratic regime for more than brief periods of time and, as such, offered no historical precedents worth revisiting. The country should emulate not Romanian interwar church-state models, they say, but Western Europe by recognizing a variety of religious groups as public entities and giving them equal chances to qualify for official recognition, government subsidies, and tax exemption status. In turn, religious groups should remain part of the civil society, and should not seek political representation. Baptist Union president Vasile Talos voiced support for a "plural society [providing] us with a wider range of experience and a wider diversity of human responses to experience, and therefore richer opportunities for testing the sufficiency of our faith than are available in a monochrome society" (1998, p. 3).

Minorities voiced concerns in response to the draft law on religion. They feared that recognizing the Orthodox Church as the national church placed them on lesser footing, and criticized the elaborate procedure by which the State Secretariat recognized new religious groups and other restrictions placed on religious activity. A group wishing official recognition as a denomination needed to present a list of supporting members, including only Romanian citizens living in the country and representing at least 1% of the total population. Religious minorities argued that no new group and many of the already recognized ones could fulfill the "1%" condition, amounting to a membership of 200,000. Another restrictive provision stated that, to become legal persons, parishes had to demonstrate that their membership represented at least 5% of the locality's adult population. The bill further stated that only Romanian citizens residing in the country could be religious leaders and church staff members. Of major concern was a provision that rendered illegal and punished with fines of up to $9,000 organized religious activity by groups not registered with the State Secretariat. Among the former communist countries, only Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan went that far in punishing unregistered religious activity. The 2006 law retained the "1%" registration requirement (Stan & Turcescu, 2010).

The Strict Separation Model
Gabriel Andreescu, a writer persecuted by the Securitate in the 1980s, articulated most clearly the separation of church and state model. As part of the Romanian Human Rights Defense Association, the Save the Carol Park, or the Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience civil society groups, Andreescu inked down several documents defending the model (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 35). According to him, strict separation of religion and politics allows both the state and the churches to be independent and autonomous from each other, and therefore it allows a radical break with the recent past, a period when the
communist state used and abused the subservient Orthodox Church. The church was reminded of its unholy collaboration with the repressive communist regime and the secret political police, its failure to stand up for the rights of freedom and religion, and its inability to resist the atheistic state. Further loss of moral ground occurred when the Orthodox Church allowed itself to be turned into a tool against the Greek Catholic Church. According to Andreescu, strict separation protected the Orthodox Church from the state and, by cutting the church’s financial umbilical cord to the government, compelled the church to return to its traditional vocation for social work and the protection of the weak and needy. Free from the burden of maneuvering among capricious political actors, the church would thus be in a better position to rediscover its spiritual mission.

Andreescu was equally concerned with keeping the state autonomous from religious groups. Ignoring the fact that the model overstates the divide between religion and politics in Western democracies, he argued that separation of state from church, notably the Orthodox Church, was essential for consolidating Romanian democracy. The model, he argued, was consonant with democracy, as illustrated by the tradition of France, Romania’s wealthier Latin cousin where republicanism and modernization have gone hand in hand with secularism. According to this approach, religious groups should be entities separate from the state, they should exist as part of the civil society, and receive no direct funding from the government. He further opposed the idea of religious education in public schools, and called for restrictions on the building of new Orthodox places of worship or as he called them, “agents of religious colonization.” The job of the state is “to protect the demarcation between the secular and the religious,” Andreescu said (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, p. 36). The model was unable to gather much support.

**Conclusion**

The place of the Orthodox Church in the new Romanian democracy remains ill defined and subject to controversy. This is because many Orthodox leaders view democratization as a threat to their Byzantine view of church-state relations and the state is unwilling to relinquish its traditional centralist coordination of religious life. These have not been easy years for the Orthodox Church, as any narrative of events suggests. Parties with strikingly different philosophies interfered constantly in its life through the passage of laws in which the church had little input. Many Orthodox core demands have been either disregarded or only partially fulfilled. These include parliamentary representation for its leaders, formal recognition as the “national church,” compulsory religious education at all pre-university levels, and a ban on abortion. But by sheer numbers alone, the Orthodox Church has maintained a strong political voice that politicians cannot ignore.

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