

## A CRITICAL WAY OF APPROACHING CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN GEOPOLITICS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The scientific novelty of the study consists of the unique, organic, integrative, synchronous and diachronic approach of this topic in the Romanian academic space after 1990. The author uses a diverse scientific methodology – inductive, deductive, cartographic, historical, statistical-mathematical, and analytical – from the intersection of political geography, geopolitics, geoeconomics, geostrategy, geo-culture and history. From the beginning of the book, he reveals an interdisciplinary vision, presenting his perspective through the complicated kaleidoscope of the main schools of geopolitics (American, German, French, British). Following in parallel, chronologically and thematically, the relations between post-totalitarian Romania and the USA, Germany and Russia, the author builds his conceptual, scientific and methodological edifice on a series of pillars, present in all five chapters: frontier, history, geopolitics, geostrategy, geoeconomics, geoculture. Benefiting from an impressive bibliography, the author offers an original and surprising view of the Romanian, American, German, and Russian geopolitical realities, managing to detach himself from prejudices, taboos, stereotypes, and leaving the sphere of official, formal and dull language, so often used in the Romanian space by politicians, journalists, and by some pseudo-specialists in geopolitics, security, etc.*

**Keywords:** *Romania, Germany, USA, Russia, political geography, geopolitics, geoeconomics, geostrategy, geoculture, border/frontier.*

**Rezumat:** *O modalitate critică de abordare a geopoliticii românești contemporane. Noutatea științifică a studiului constă în abordarea unică, organică, integrativă, sincronă și diacronică a acestui subiect în spațiul academic românesc de după 1990. Autorul folosește o metodologie științifică diversă – inductivă, deductivă, cartografică, istorică, statistică-matematică și analitică – aflată la intersecția geografiei politice cu geopolitica, geoeconomia, geostrategia, geo-cultura și istoria. De la începutul cărții, el dezvăluie o viziune interdiscipli-*

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<sup>1</sup> Review on: Florin Pintescu, *Politicile SUA, Germaniei și Rusiei în spațiul românesc (1990-2018)* [The US, German and Russian policies in the Romanian space (1990-2018)], Târgoviște, Editura „Cetatea de Scaun”, 2019, 316 pp, note, bibliografie, indice.

nară, prezentându-și perspectiva prin caleidoscopul complicat al principalelor școli de geopolitică (americană, germană, franceză, britanică). Urmând, în paralel, cronologic și tematic, relațiile dintre România post-totalitară și SUA, Germania și Rusia, autorul își construiește edificiul conceptual, științific și metodologic pe o serie de piloni, prezenți în toate cele cinci capitole: frontieră, istorie, geopolitică, geostrategie, geoeconomie, geocultură. Beneficiind de o bibliografie impresionantă, autorul oferă o viziune originală și surprinzătoare a realităților geopolitice românești, americane, germane și ruse, reușind să se detașeze de prejudecăți, tabuuri, stereotipuri și părăsind sfera limbajului oficial, formal și plictisitor, atât de des utilizate în spațiul românesc de politicieni, jurnaliști și de unii pseudo-specialiști în geopolitică, securitate etc.

International relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, besides the national interests, international law, alliances and adversities, are strongly influenced by geography, the location or proximity of a “hot” zone, or the existence or absence of the natural resources, the appearance of “frozen” conflicts in some regions etc. After the end of the Cold War, in the new security context, Romania’s positioning in the extended Black Sea region becomes an object of the great powers interest, but also offers it a chance to impose itself as an important subject of the regional international relations. Florin Pintescu’s study tries to sketch the picture of the complex interferences of great powers’ actions and strategies in Eastern Europe and the way Romania relates to the challenges of the Third Millennium.

Florin Pintescu’s book is based on the principle of interdisciplinarity, having various methodological and conceptual approaches. The author uses a wide range of research methods, such as inductive, deductive, cartographical, statistical and mathematical, historical, analytical, and synthetical. They reflect not only the complexity of his thinking but also a very efficient working technique.

In the first chapter entitled *Geopolitics of the “frontiers” and the influence spheres. Introductory considerations*, the author describes comparatively, using the method of analysis and synthesis, a few significant directions exercised by the representative of the American, British, German, French, and Romanian geopolitical schools. Approaching a dynamic and flexible vision, he defines geopolitical concepts such as *border, frontier, sphere of influence, frontier phenomenon, horogenesis* (frontier genesis), etc. The conceptual introspection applies to the relations of Romania with the USA, Germany, and Russia. Pintescu also pays special attention to the geopolitical relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. From the very beginning, the author announces his intention to base his study on the following pillars: political geography, geopolitics, geoeconomics, geostrategy, and geoculture.

The second chapter reveals in a comparative and holistic *modus operandi*,

the weaknesses and strengths of Romania on the international stage, in the year 1989 as a *turning point* from the communist totalitarianism to democracy. Thus, Florin Pintescu considers that the situation of Romania in terms of geopolitical, geoeconomic, geostrategic and geocultural realities, was quite precarious, but not catastrophic. The numerous and various statistical data critically interpreted, allowed the author to identify the several vulnerabilities of the Romanian political space, on its way to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

The third chapter – *Policies of the United States of America in the Romanian space after events of December 1989* – includes the following subdivisions: “Geohistorical aspects”, “Geocultural considerations”, “Geoeconomic aspects”, “Geostrategic considerations and Case study: NATO and the geopolitical issues of Romania”. In his analysis, Pintescu starts from the premise of the geostrategic and geoeconomic domination of the great powers over the small and medium states. He recalls two axiomatic elements of international relations: “1. Small states cannot be truly independent, as they depend at least geoeconomically speaking (if not geostrategically too) on great powers. 2. In case that a great power collapses, its place will be taken automatically, or shortly after, by another great power. Consequently, the small state will not become «independent», but will only change the master” (p. 298).

In a nuanced manner, professor Pintescu states and supports the idea that the USA – although it was the major winner of the Cold War – preferred first to consolidate its cultural influence over Romania instead increasing its economic impact. After 2004, the American superpower chose to integrate Romania within its geostrategic vision, to fade or cancel a possible Russian influence. The US policy towards Romania after 2007 (Romania’s acceptance in the EU) preserved the same geostrategic and geocultural coordinates. The US’s sole power was undermined after 2007 by the rise of China, Germany and the Russian Federation. The geoeconomic influence of the USA in Romania, after 1989, is lower than that of Germany and the Russian Federation. This situation proved to be unfavourable for Romania because it still maintains multiple dependencies on the great powers: geostrategically is depending on the USA, and geoeconomically on Germany and the Russian Federation. After 2008, the collaboration between Russia and the European Union (*condominium* in Central and Eastern Europe between Russia and Germany) imposed the need for a permanent American intervention (as a balancing power). Therefore, there is the possibility that Romania will become either an EU colony or a Russian colony.

The fourth chapter – *Germany and Romania post – 1989. Geohistorical, geocultural, geoeconomical, geopolitical, and geostrategic aspects* – issues various problems, such as the pressure of integration into the European Community (EU),

the geocultural presence of Germany in Romania, the advantages and disadvantages of the German geoeconomic influence in the Romanian space. Unlike some countries in central Europe (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia), the cultural proximity between Romania and Germany has remained quite narrow or elitist, because Romanians usually prefer to learn English, a language more accessible, than German. In terms of geoeconomics, Germany imposed itself in Romania quite effortlessly, a situation that generated a series of advantages: German investments (in 2019 there were over 20,000 companies with German capital, with a turnover of almost 5 billion euros). At present, Germany remains the largest trading partner of Romania. However, the Romanian-German economic relations also have a series of disadvantages: the lack of complementarities between the Romanian and the German economy; the possibility of partial subordination of some Romanian economic branches to the German economy; the economic proximity of Germany to Russia and Hungary, countries whose elites have constantly shown their hostility towards Romania.

Since the modern era (18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), the domestic and international political evolution of the Romanian space was, more or less, influenced by the rise, stagnation or decline of Russia. The coagulation of the Romanian nation-state often intersected with Russian geopolitical and geostrategic interests in South-Eastern Europe and the Black Sea basin. After the Great Powers recognized the Independence of Romania at the Peace Congress in Berlin (1878), the Romanian authorities and public opinion situated towards Russian state on positions that oscillated “between either anti-Russianism often obsessive or (at best) recklessness and ignorance of the realities of Russia. The reception of Russian culture, as well as the image of Russia in the Romanian space (problems related, from a scientific point of view, with the history of mentalities), are aspects either little studied or distorted by the past heritage. Wrongly, Russian culture is seen today by Romania’s public opinion as inferior to Western culture, even inferior to Romanian culture. To this contributes a poor knowledge of the Russian language in Romania and the cultural westernization of Romania, achieved after 1990, in which the Russian Federation has declined for a decade and could not influence the realities of Romania” (p. 302).

In the fifth chapter entitled *The Policies of the Russian Federation in Romania post - 1991*, Pintescu reviews the following elements: the geopolitical importance of Russia on a global level; geohistorical, geocultural, geoeconomic and geostrategic considerations on Romanian-Russian relations, adding at the end of the chapter a captivating case study on the geopolitical interdependencies between Romania, Russia and the Republic of Moldova. According to the author, the geoeconomic presence of the Russian Federation in Romania is not as relevant as that

of Germany (although it surpasses that of the USA), manifesting itself especially in some economic branches, such as the energy or steel industry. From a geo-strategic point of view, the Romanian-Russian collaboration is influenced by the position towards NATO. The US strategy to combat Russia's aggressive objectives in Eastern Europe includes the process of transforming Romania into a buffer region at NATO's external border.

Likewise, Romania's relationship with the Russian Federation reflects the measures adopted in domestic and foreign policy by the Republic of Moldova. Thus, in political, economic, military, cultural terms, the cooperation between Moldova and Romania is closely linked to Moscow's often unpredictable and oscillating attitude. Unfortunately, the fifth chapter of Pintescu's book, dedicated to Romanian-Russian relations, does not benefit from a bibliography in Russian, a weakness somehow compensated by using translated works of well-known Russian geopolitical specialists, as well as government web sources, which offer an objective image of the main directions of the Russian foreign policy.

Also, some statements, although logical, are insufficiently covered from a documentary point of view and the author's diatribes towards the Romanian political class may seem subjective and partisan, especially in a scientific paper.

The author also inserts in the text a series of paragraphs written in a familiar language, with a strong aesthetic and stylistic effect, but quite inappropriate with the rigour imposed by a scientific text.

By participating in numerous conferences and publishing valuable specialized studies, Florin Pintescu has proven, in the last decade, profound knowledge of Moldavian's domestic and foreign policy. In his opinion, the bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova are frequently under the influence of a set of factors, which act synchronously: historical, cultural, religious, linguistic affinities established for several hundred years between the neo-Latin ethnic group in Romania and the Republic of Moldova; the influence of the regional and transnational policies of the EU; the positioning of these two states at the intersection of geostrategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of the EU, NATO and Russia.

In such a context, the author considers that the EU cooperation's agreements with the former Soviet republics (including the Republic of Moldova) are under the influence of the following coordinates: the gradual inclusion of these states in the EU economic sphere, by creating free trade areas, and by signing bilateral treaties; concluding "mobility and security pacts" dedicated to the fight against illegal migration; creating integrated border management structures; increasing the legal mobility of the labour force; improving the energy security of

the EU and its partners in the agreement called the European Neighbourhood Policy (2007-2010). European Union promotes, continuously, relations with the Republic of Moldova and Romania, implementing *multilateralism*, *soft power policy*, and persuasion. Therefore, the author emphasizes that the bilateral relations between the two *sister states* must be strengthened based on pragmatic and not sentimental principles. He recalls a series of landmarks, such as: capitalizing on the complementarity between the economies of the two countries; approaching international relations from a multilateral geopolitical perspective; the avoidance by both states of their transformation into mere “chair legs” of the EU, NATO or Russia; maintaining current statehood of the Republic of Moldova or uniting this country with Romania.

The appendices of Florin Pintescu’s book completes the interdisciplinary vision on the topic under discussion. They consist of a series of analytical and comparative tables, regarding the demographic and economic evolution of Romania, in relation to developed or developing countries. The author also includes several maps on various topics: the spheres of influence and interest of Germany and France; redistribution of the areas of the political ascendancy of the Russian Federation; Germany in Europe, from the late 90’s to the first decades of the 2000s. Pintescu also provides within appendices a list of legal instruments regarding bilateral cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

The work of Professor Pintescu was based on his doctoral thesis in Geography, completed and defended at the University “Al. I. Cuza” from Iași in 2015. In our opinion, the fundamental objective of the book (finding the truth, *sine ira et studio*) was, successfully, achieved, both formally and informally. The author used a wide range of research methods, as well as a vast conceptual universe, in an original and multidisciplinary vision. Without claiming that he will reach absolute truths, impossible to achieve through an epistemological approach, Florin Pintescu has managed to open new directions in analysing of the contemporary relations of Romania with the USA, Germany, and Russia.

This scientific achievement on the vast realm of geopolitics would not have been possible and feasible without the use of information from very diverse and different fields: history, geography (economic and human), demography, political economy, sociology, cultural studies. The book is worthy of appreciation not only for the author’s intellectual effort over several years of diligent research but especially for his original vision and courage to go beyond public, official statements or questionable scientific approaches on a subject that can sometimes become too sensitive.