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Geopolitical bases of the
Romanian political thinking

PhD Thesis

Abstract

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The topic and the scientific problem

The reason for the analysis of the Romanian political thinking has been a need for determination of its geographical and geopolitical backgrounds, as well as, the contemporary phenomenon referring to the international security environment that is still largely being prevailed by national interests and intentions.

Despite the recent years with integrative tendencies the competition among countries has not stopped, not even in any context of alliance or partnership relations, which may well raise the necessity to improve capacities enforcing the Hungarian interests. In line with the subject of the present thesis it is also necessary to examine the geopolitical specialities of the Romanian foreign and security policy also having in mind the bilateral Hungarian-Romanian relationship, especially that our neighbour has a Hungarian minority of about one and a half million. At the same time the geopolitical theories do not frame a single, closed system, but do relate with other subsystems within the society, such as science, culture or education. This leads to the assumption that the concept of geopolitics should also be considered in conjunction with mentality and national conscience determining the Romanian political thinking on the long run.

Aims and methods

Taking into consideration the geographical basis of geopolitics I first aimed at treating of the history of Romanian geopolitical theory, its major personalities and concepts including *presentation* and *analysis* of relevant sources, books and studies. By *analogy* I also wished to present some then Hungarian and foreign (German, French) theoretical parallels. In doing so, I started out from the fact that the founder of the Romanian geographical school, *Simion Mehedinți* (1869-1962), defended his thesis in Leipzig, as a student of Ratzel's who indirectly might have inseminate the Romanian school, as well.

Besides the theoretical analysis I did present contemporary foreign and security policy related concepts in which I was following the presence of the geographical and geopolitical factors, practically the signs of the newly applied classical geopolitical arguments.

The numerous geographical arguments together with the Romanian society largely supporting NATO and European Union membership of the country offered an other assumption: geopolitical arguments can only be effective when the audience has the necessary attitude or educated enough to receive and understand them. This hypothesis resulted in examining the Romanian education, more exactly, the subject of geography, by which I aimed to search for the presence of geopolitical connotations and, as a deduction, to prove their being and becoming imbedded in the Romanian national conscience.

Framing topic, structure, sources and time

The main goal of my thesis is to describe the Romanian geopolitical school, as well as the geopolitical thinking and set of argument, and to unveil its presence and roles in the political thinking especially in the contemporary foreign, security and education policy.

In Chapter 1 Romania's major physical, economical and military geography related characteristics have been collected. With this describing overview I wanted to present those peculiarities that may be of geopolitical importance or quoted in further parts of the thesis. I primarily used Hungarian sources, atlases and the internet.

In Chapter 2 I presented and described the theoretical history of the Romanian geopolitical thinking using Romanian or Romanian authors' English, French and Italian books and different publications. To show theoretical analogies I also included foreign and Hungarian references.

In Chapter 3 I examined the contemporary effects of the classical Romanian geopolitical thinking, first studying the geographical arguments in the Military Strategy of 2000 and in the government program aiming EU-membership in the same time period, and also in the National Security Strategy that was approved in 2006, in the era of the war on terrorism. Concerning the geographical education I went through certain high school books of geography valid in the period of 2004-2007.

As far as the whole timeframe of my studies is concerned I started out from the second part of the 19th Century, which is reasoned by a special coincidence between the formation of the Romanian statehood and the discipline of geopolitics, and formally ended at the 1st of January 2007, when Romania joined the European Union.

Overall conclusions

Romania's geographical position, physical geographical peculiarities and the structure of the surrounding powers – varying by time, intensity and potentiality – underline its being in a transitional, intersectional situation not only geographically, but geopolitically, too. The members of the Romanian scientific life recognised the specialties of this situation relating to the discipline of geography, which finally lead to the adaptation of Western geographical and geopolitical ideas. The discipline of geopolitics may be regarded as a Western modernisation effect on the Romanian political thinking.

The advantageous results of the 1st World War must have carried a positive lesson to the Romanian geography, meaning that geography can be a useful tool to form politics in solving international conflicts, so Romanian geopolitical experts went on to work out and increase the intensity of further geopolitical thoughts and ideas to consolidate Great Romania's territorial integrity.

I stated that the Romanian geopolitical school was founded by important representatives of the Romanian geography (S. Mehedinți, G. Vâlsan stb.), historiography (N. Iorga, Gh. I. Brătianu) and other disciplines (sociology, ethnography, statistics) that joined that trend from the late 19th Century and who had also had studies in abroad schools in West Europe. The Romanian geographical and geopolitical school integrating other disciplines could become effective to define the country's geopolitical functions and intentions, but – dealing with past actions and correlations – also, to support the Romanian historiography with its historical geographical (geohistorical) vision.

The institutional background of the Romanian geopolitical school was based on the Romanian Society of Geography and the regional university faculties that closely followed the territorial growth of Romania. The Romanian geopolitical school was formed by the mixing and unifying physical and human geographical arguments, and – along with the popularity of geography – it could become (or could have been taken as) a most widely accepted and successful explanative theory in Romania.

The Romanian geopolitical theories and concepts have not changed much until today, except for being adapted to the actual political and security environment. Certain continuity can be touched upon the presence of the geographical determinism (of basically German origin) and its opposite, the human and society focused French school. This phenomenon also shows a special case that the French trend can easily go friendly with the German one, because their factors and effects do not cancel, neutralise each other, but moreover, they

marry in the Romanian geopolitics. Besides the character of the arguments, neither has the activity of the Romanian geopolitics changed because similar theories were born during the socialist era.

To summarise and generalise the set of the Romanian geopolitical arguments, I created two *models*. In the first one I grouped the applied *physical and human geographical* factors and paired them with their geopolitical connotation(s). Among the most common physical factors I noted the Carpathians, the Danube, the Black Sea and the country's relief, while the human geographical factors can be the number of population, the religion, Latinity or language. The second model divides the geopolitical aims into two groups, the *international* part referring to foreign political efforts and the *national* part that carries internal meaning mostly about Romania's being a nation state.

Regarding the practical usage of geopolitics I could prove the presence of the classical Romanian geopolitical views in the NATO accession foreign and military policy efforts and communication, and also in the national security strategy studied. The set of arguments is centred around the *Danube* as a commercial and civilisation liaison, and the favourable strategic position given by the *Black Sea*, especially the *vicinity* of Russia and certain CIS countries, and not the least, that of *Iraq* and *Afghanistan* regarding the international (NATO, USA) war against terrorism. The contemporary Romanian geopolitical arguments implying geographic determination are paired with NATO and EU membership (and the prestige deriving from it) and an intensive foreign military (peace support) commitment that finally express the notion of a regional leading country.

Similarly to the above, the contemporary Romanian geographical high school education also include reflexes of the classical geopolitical thinking. The geopolitics related parts are placed in different levels of the subject so being additions to the relevant geographical description or problem. In my opinion the subject examined largely uses traditional geopolitical connotations adapted to the present situation, in which Romania is: an ideal geopolitical country; competing and competitive; East European, but by security tied to the South-Eastern European region and having a leading role there; a medium power; composed of major European natural elements; having access to sea; an active player in European and Euro-Atlantic integration; active in keeping international stability and support of anti-terrorist war. The teaching of these elements in high-school contributes to geopolitics becoming part of a common understanding, national conscience and patriotism for the population of the Romanian society.

Interpretation of the new results

1. In the framework of my thesis I have presented and analysed – in Hungarian language – the theoretical history of the Romanian geopolitical thinking, which is closely connected to geography. With this I have also collected and published the basic sources of the topic.
2. By chronological analysis I have stated that the Romanian geopolitical thinking can be described continuous both theoretically and practically from its birth at the second half of the 19th Century throughout to the present days.
3. I have created two models to summarise and group the different Romanian geopolitical arguments. The first model deals with physical and human geographical factors, while the other is divided into international and national geopolitical purposes.
4. Based on the analysis of foreign and security policy concepts, I have proved that the contemporary Romanian intentions imply the signs of the classical geopolitical school, thus rely on geographical factors, as determiners.
5. I have made it clear that the contemporary Romanian education of geography mixes modern political geographical elements with classical geopolitical theories, which eventually leads to the imbedding of geopolitics into the Romanian national conscience and patriotism.

Recommendations

1. The deeper knowledge about the Romanian geopolitical thinking may contribute to its comparison with the Hungarian school, which historically have a lot of theoretical similarities and practical controversies in common
2. Based on the revealed sources the research of the Romanian geopolitical school may be deepened in the future, and can be a base to carry on the disputes about the theory of geopolitics.
3. The analysis of the background of the Romanian geopolitical ideas may contribute to evaluating and foreseeing the intentions of our neighbour country, also in light of its having one and a half million Hungarian minority.
4. Recognising geopolitics as a factor of national conscience may contribute to a more effective continuation of the Hungarian-Romanian bilateral relationship, and to forecasting third parties' evaluations especially in the framework of common participations in international organisations.
5. The geographical determinism related content of the contemporary Romanian concepts may be integrated in regional assessments, background analyses.
6. Certain parts of the thesis can be integrated in security and defence studies, and directly or indirectly taught in the military science, geography and history education.
7. Experiences gained from the Romanian geographic manuals can be used in the Hungarian teaching of geography and in rethinking the depth and content of its geopolitical subject.