

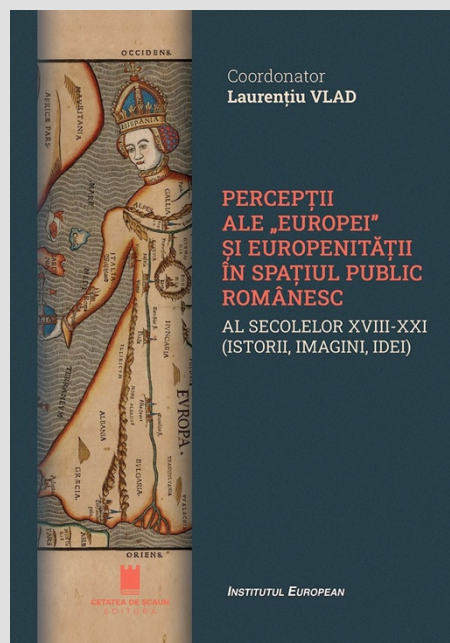
Book Review of: Laurențiu Vlad
(Editor)

Perceptions of Europe and Europeaness in the Romanian Public Space. From the 18th to the 21st Century. (Histories, Images, Ideas)

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The work coordinated by Professor Laurențiu Vlad brings to our attention several themes and topics that require deeper reflection on the perception of Europe and European identity within the Romanian context. Examining this work from a historical didactic viewpoint reveals its significant value, particularly in the current context where Europe confronts numerous challenges related to identity and the restoration of values (Petrila, 2014:106-121). This is especially pertinent given the often-unproductive discourse surrounding regions that tend to create divisions rather than foster unity (Stoica, 2022:267-277). Taking into account both the geographical location and the cultural framings and non-framings of Romania, this deeper exploration of the topic serves as a response to a necessity related to cultural positioning and the restoration of national identity. In a different context, the paper demonstrates that the Romanian identity was strengthened through the processes of Europeanisation fostered by education (Marino, 2005:195-235) and intellectual discourse acquired from the West (Dutu, 1999:237-250).

The first section of the volume focuses on aspects relating to synchronicity, values, frameworks, or various perspectives and representations of the university's culturality and identity. In addition to the

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challenges of academic training, there was also a constant weighing of identities (Șerbănescu, 2005:51-70). Professor Nicoară addresses, in his characteristic, rigorous manner, the phenomenon of French civilization, which has occasionally become a benchmark for societal paradigms. For the emerging Romanian intellectuals, who pursued their studies in France during this era, the French system served as a model of cultural allure that they attempted to politically advocate through initiatives linked to diverse approaches regarding values and culture.

Professor Platon from Iasi proceeds by delving into the understanding and development of the European mentality, characterizing the process of civilisation as fundamentally an intrinsic Europeanisation. Although we observe a greater emphasis on elements associated with Romanian identity, or more accurately, the traits of Romanians across various regions, it is essential to remember that just as we have adopted European influences, the European identity has likewise been shaped by contributions from its cultural peripheries (Tartler, 2005). However, this transformation does not occur through procedural mechanisms; as per the documents referenced (such as diaries and other correspondence), Europeanisation should be viewed through the lens of sentimental anthropology. Typical attitudes and behaviours contribute to a mannerism defined in a broader, rather than merely cultural, sense. At the onset of the 19th century, Romanian society began to embrace certain behaviours characteristic of the West, even though it was frequently apparent from the letters and diaries of foreigners that the habits of a less civilised populace were still firmly established (Fligstein et al., 2011).

The work continues with highlights on the perspective of the Transylvanians regarding the realm of European civilization. They believed, among other aspects, that Europe serves as the foundation of science and education, outshining all other regions of the world. In a biblical analogy, civilized Europe was perceived as being within, while the barbarians were seen as being outside, akin to how darkness is regarded as external according to the Gospels.

An important point that arises from the insightful work examined in this review is that, among the many Transylvanian-Romanian students who were studying throughout Europe during that time, most were found in Budapest and Vienna, while others found themselves in Leipzig, Berlin, Rome, or Paris, where Romanian youth pursued their education with considerable enthusiasm and optimism. It is also significant to mention that more than a quarter of these students were offspring of farmers. Indeed, Transylvania has consistently assumed an unusual role in the Europeanisation process due to its confessional and ethnic diversity (Polgar, 2020).

The second part of the work introduces a range of initiatives during the inter-war period, when discussions about Romanians as part of European culture began to emerge. Cultural projects, such as the *European Idea*, prompted Romanian society—particularly in Transylvania—to engage in reflections and substantial writings that indeed intertwined us with the cultural and historical heritage from which we originated. Subsequently, history textbooks began to reference the grandeur of European culture and the aspirations of young individuals to alter, transform, and enhance the Romanian identity as an essential component of the broader European culture. These references marked the inception of the early signs of the contemporary European project. Titulescu asserted that Europe must achieve unity through the spiritualization of its borders. It can be argued that this spiritualization of borders has contributed to the current state of Schengen. In the context of discussions among Romanian historians regarding the present European project, Professor Pecican succinctly illustrates the increasing focus on territorial and continental boundaries and reorganizations. In addition to Europe's external challenges, historian Alina Stoica highlights, through a case study from the Crișana region, that Europe faced internal difficulties, particularly following the Peace Treaties, which resulted in various forms of diplomatic complexities and challenges.

The third section of the work, covering the years 1940 to 1980, presents a collection of analyses that reveal various aspects regarding the understanding of Europeanness within Romania. This includes contributions from notable individuals, such as Adrian Marino, or refers to the literary and cinematic filters imposed by the infamous regime. It required a discerning eye to differentiate between censorship and propaganda and to comprehend the challenges involved in untangling a culture that had been ambitiously constructed since the days when Romanian youth were exploring ideas in Vienna, Leipzig, and beyond. Those young individuals ultimately left their ancestors behind to uphold their European aspirations at home. Following the 1940s, Romania faced numerous challenges characterized by a series of isolations and dangers that increasingly drove many Romanians to seek a better life. Consequently, during this period, the prominent Romanian elite found themselves in exile. From this position, they endeavored to communicate with their compatriots, who were subjected daily to hunger and censorship, through various lobbying efforts and via Radio Free Europe, proclaiming that freedom was attainable (Korkut, 2006:131-155).

The concluding section of the study, which aligns with the post-Communist era, highlights several prominent themes. These range from the obstacles and challenges related to the Euro-Atlantic pathway, to debates surrounding monarchy and republic, and extending to discussions about

the European Union or the United States of Europe (a conversation that not only remains incomplete, but I also question if it ever truly commenced), as well as minority concerns and even the rise of populist and Eurosceptic movements. The topic of cultural diversity and cultural identity is discussed from various perspectives, not in a contentious manner, but rather in a thoughtful effort to comprehend the factors that unite us (Brie, 2012).

Professor Cioroianu examines the topic of monarchy versus republic within the framework of the European idea, a subject that has been extensively analysed in academic literature (Wiszowaty, 2023:1-19). The subsequent text authored by Professor Dogot addresses the phenomenon of populism following the events of 1989 in Romania. Regrettably, both Romania and Hungary are not unique instances of populism emerging after the fall of the USSR; this trend is also observable in nations with more established democracies and traditions, such as the Netherlands, France, Germany, and even in the context of Brexit (Popescu et al., 2022:13-22). The cultural factors contributing to populist voting can be associated with shifts in value systems, which literature describes as a gradual transition in Western society's values from conservative to liberal. The latter encompasses issues such as gender equality, a subject explored in the recent study presented in the paper, where Professors Miscoiu, Gherghina, and Șamșudean discuss orthodoxy, sexual minorities, and the acceptance of diverse partnerships and lifestyles. Addressing populism is imperative. Populism diminishes life opportunities by promising a return to a glorified past that never existed. It also heightens the risk of conflict with neighbouring countries. Populism has various underlying causes that require attention, yet there are numerous more effective solutions to these challenges if they are deliberated with the public (Aiginger et al., 2020).

I can confidently assert that the study pursues a natural, organic, and entirely unforced progression of perceptions, mentalities, and developments pertaining to Europe within the Romanian context. It is my belief that if such studies were more extensively disseminated or even concisely presented, Romanians would gain a far clearer understanding of the complexities involved in establishing a culture, a framework of thought, and ultimately, a freedom of conscience that allows one to maintain their identity, even when interlinked with others through technical and bureaucratic frameworks.

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