

# A. D. Xenopol the European

## The Viability of the Concept of Nation and the National Feeling

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### Introduction

**A**D. XENOPOL (1847–1920) was educated as a scholar, philosopher of history and culture, and historian under the direct influence of his contemporary Western culture, in the fields of judicial sciences, sociology, general economics, Romanian history, world history, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, evolutionism, geopolitics, and in other fields of knowledge. Being a polyglot scholar with multi and meta-disciplinary training, this European thinker had constant concerns in selecting the most adequate methods and procedures of scientific research in order to discover the truth according to the objectives identified for each field of research. Most of the scholarly investigations he carried out—on ethnic groups, peoples, the human race, culture, nation, language, national feeling etc.—are in tight connection with other branches of knowledge and their constitutive disciplines regarded in their historical dynamic. His philosophical and multidisciplinary training helped him in reaching the goals of his research. He also proved great capacity for innovation and originality, as indicated by his profound and comprehensive body of works.

Repeatedly, the Romanian scholar expressed his conviction that knowledge and scientific research are not to be pursued only for the sake of their own progress. They have to meet the concrete needs of human communities, to lead to the improvement of the economic, political and cultural relations specific for each historical period according to a nations' goals regarding wellbeing and happiness. D. D. Roșca, a philosopher from the Transylvanian town of Cluj, considered Xenopol to be “one of our great scholars” who deserved utmost praise for his contribution to the history of Romanian and European culture.<sup>1</sup>

He left his imprint on different areas of research, such as the development of the concept of nation, human races, national culture, and patriotism. The results of his investigations in these fields of knowledge are deep, innovative and important for the advancement of learning. Basically, his conceptions and ideas in the fields of social philosophy and culture, anthropology, sociology, and social psychology remain valid even in our times, in the age of globalization/ internationalization, being able to provide use-

ful contextualizations to various decision-makers. Some of his research targeted major issues of his times—the transition from the domination of empires to a multicultural Europe and the turn from the implementation of the national principle to the building of new civilizations. These new civilizations were to be founded on other principles than national exploitation or various types of historical injustice, relying instead on peace, the full cohabitation of nations, and the creation of national states. The Romanian people embraced such national desiderata at a time when the Romanians were divided into unnatural, artificial subunits under the domination of foreign imperialist powers. Acknowledging his merits, C. Schifirneț wrote that A. D. Xenopol “approached the national issues as a result of their relevance in the process of the modern evolution of the Romanian state.”<sup>22</sup>

In dealing with the same national desiderata, the Romanian political elite, as well as the elites from other Eastern European countries, needed a historical, scientific, humanist and wise vision for their own progress in the European context of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their progress was also connected to the evolution of other European nations, the future of Europe in general and of the international political order. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the European states sought to found a universal civilization, based on the idea of preserving the specificity of each nation. Therefore, Xenopol’s work was addressed to all those involved in the discovery and achievement of the proper way in which to reconfigure the European system at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His approach was oriented towards satisfying the national aspirations manifested for centuries and was meant to uphold the inalienable rights of the European nations.

## **The Nation: Civilizing Factor and a Way of Achieving Mankind’s Aspirations**

**B**EGINNING WITH his studies at the University of Berlin and his cooperation with the cultural club Junimea (The Youth) of Jassy, Xenopol studied the history of various human communities, peoples, empires, and states in their tight connections with internal and external factors influencing their evolution: race, geographic environment, climate, natural resources, mentality, economy, culture, language, nation, national culture, communication inside communities and between generations, etc. His analyses were influenced by the works of prominent historians (Paul Lacombe, Émile Boutroux, Henri Berr, Gabriel Monod, Jules Michelet, Edgar Quinet, Henry Thomas Buckle, Hippolyte Taine etc.), psychologists and prestigious sociologists (such as Moritz Lazarus, Gustave Le Bon, Herbert Spencer etc.), by evolutionism and the Baden School of philosophy. The scientific and philosophical ideas in the literature of those times were collected and developed by the Romanian scholar in an original way.

In this context, Xenopol considered that any ethnic group, people, or human race experienced an evolution, developed historically, interacting with other groups, often merging with others through migration, conquests, aggressions, invasions, political changes

etc. The progress of people was ascribed to the influence of various actions related to coexistence. Thus, the “spirit that triggers the historical phenomena”<sup>33</sup> is driven by two significant elements: “the environment, namely nature and the geographical location where the people come to live, and the race or the complexity of the organic and psychological structure of the individuals forming the human group.”<sup>34</sup>

The bioorganic complexity of a people, its influences on their intellectual manifestations, on historical events are at the grounds for the assertion of the national character,<sup>5</sup> which emerges gradually in history in the form of habits, customs, folk art, traditions, language, mental structure etc.; thus, a people’s soul develops and comes to shape its entire historical evolution. That is why, claims Xenopol, a people’s historical evolution and gradual structuring during the last centuries, its national life, could be substantially understood by analyzing not only the external conditional factors but, mostly, by way of ethnical and psychological studies, of inter-disciplinary research.

The people’s biogenetic components, race implicitly, can only play a passive role in the evolution of society. The development of social groups, of peoples, is the result of their intellectual strength, of their minds and intelligence—claims Xenopol, influenced by Gustave Le Bon.<sup>6</sup> Each people is the result of particular series of historical events, of environmental and racial conditions; also, each people has a specific existence and nature, being different from the others. Regardless of their historical origin, being either an unaltered race or resulting from several successive ethnic layers, the “people always appear with a particular physiognomy imprinted both upon their physical time, and upon their moral and intellectual character.”<sup>7</sup> The differences between peoples are visible in terms of manners, habits, political institutions, organization of the economy, folklore, philosophy, and, in particular, of language. A common language—Xenopol contended—naturally developed as a means to ease people’s lives, to facilitate communication between them, to strengthen the community in the relations with the environment and other people, and, not lastly, in order to reach new stages of civilization.

Historically, people evolved by gradually establishing a national life and developing, in this respect, defensive capabilities and representative institutions likely to ensure their independence. The meaning of national life consists in “strengthening human life in all directions: art, literature, philosophy, the skills and manners specific for each human group and, finally, in developing the productive forces which are to serve in the achievement of all other goals.”<sup>8</sup> The inner world of each people is called national spirit. Individuals are interconnected, as members of a group of people, within this inner world by their love for the country, by lofty national feelings. Consequently, the nation is the unity between a territory sheltering the members of the same group of people and the national souls embodied in habits, customs, manners, folk art etc. The unity of soul, national culture—the factor coagulating the people’s unity—and the establishment of national life find their origin in the national spirit, in the common language and in the love for the country and the nation.

The historical and social development of nations occurs differently from one people to another, depending on factors of differentiation, on the conditions acting upon their evolution. The peoples and the nations have similar common elements in their constitution, they possess a common cultural and mental fund, part of the general heritage of

the human civilization; at the same time, they are unique, they have elements differentiating them, conferring them identity or what appears to be *national specificity*. In his important work *The History of Romanians in Trajan's Dacia*,<sup>9</sup> Xenopol substantially and persuasively outlines the national character, namely, the specificity of the Romanian people. Using his large historical knowledge of Europe, of universal and comparative history, Xenopol shows that the principle of unity manifests itself in diversity, highlighting the relation between universal and specific in the development of nations towards a planetary civilization based on a gradual globalization of the relations between nations. In this regard, he argues that national specificity is not to be atrophied. On the contrary, after the fall of empires, in a future European society organized according to the national principle and based on national states relying on an international establishment characterized by independence, equality, and national sovereignty, the natural particularities of each people should develop in tight connection with the universal heritage of all peoples and nations.

The evolution of each nation should not be jeopardized by the assertion of its national character. The nation should play an increased part as a civilizing element for the prosperity of mankind as a whole. The national soul—as a “common part of all individual expressions of the nations,”<sup>10</sup> manifested in specific actions starting with language as the product of the collective mind and continuing with folklore, the national manners, habits, dances and costumes up to architecture and traditional tools—will continue to shape history in the society of the future, remaining the source of mankind’s prosperity and wellbeing.

Xenopol’s ideas on the historical development of peoples and nations, on the international system of his times and on the prospects of nations are still valid, being advocated in schools and universities, in the media; at the same time, they guide the activities and decisions of democratic states, and implicitly the functioning of the diplomatic relations carried out for the consolidation of a higher planetary civilization.

## National Culture and Love for the Country

**T**HE NATIONAL life of each people cannot be conceived or understood as a whole without its correlative, namely, national culture. “The elements of culture are only two: the soul and the impressions it receives from the outside world; mankind’s progress derives steadily from the nourishing of one through the others, and it tends towards the infinite.”<sup>11</sup> Nations have specific different cultures, with unique elements; together with their general elements, they shape specific events. The historical evolution of nations reveals a tight interconnection between the specific expressions and the general ones, common to all nations.

The elements of national culture developed and expanded historically, progressively accumulating from one generation to another, in the soul of people, as their “own national thesaurus.”<sup>12</sup> The soul of each people develops a particular way to contemplate and envisage the world, an ensemble of notions determining the result of its works, implicitly the particular character of its future development.

To the question “What does national culture consist of?”<sup>13</sup> Xenopol provided the following answer: “Language, law, habits, literature and customs, fine arts.”<sup>14</sup> Understood in this manner, national culture represents a necessity for the existence of each people aspiring to national life and progress. Having established the content of the notion of national culture, the Romanian scholar inferred that the national culture of a people consists, above all, in keeping and developing its language. The second step would be to regulate the relations between individuals, according to the people’s own ideals of happiness. Last but not least, the national culture consists in the cultivation of arts and literature, so that everything that is beautiful and original in the soul of people develops and expresses itself in the outside world.

The development of people and the fulfillment of a nation depend on the advancements in the field of national culture. National culture is the factor maintaining and developing the self-awareness and the affirmation of national life; the latter is a main element of mankind’s heritage, implicitly generating individual development. As history proves, this is the reason why people “prefer to die than to sacrifice willingly the treasure of their soul, and, in such deeds, mankind sees glory for the victim and infamy for the executioner.”<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, the self-aware individuals who also feel part of the national conscience will feel love for their country, for their people, because national life is essential for one’s happiness.

Addressing the issues of mankind as a whole, universal culture and its purposes, Xenopol claims that the universal aspiration of mankind consists in providing the necessary conditions for the improvement of the individual, as a member of humanity, equally at material, intellectual and moral levels.<sup>16</sup> Individuals should constantly receive strong impulses for activities generating progress for mankind. Consequently, national culture is a factor for the establishment and development of peoples, for the progress of global society and for individual happiness; national culture is important both for people and for mankind.

*In it, the individuals, from whom everything starts, find their happiness; they move forward with it on the open path and work for the common purpose. The whole of history proves this truth, showing us that only peoples reaching a national life, a clear self-awareness of their existence, produced something for the benefit of humankind.*<sup>17</sup>

The psychological, evolutionist and multidisciplinary outlook on “ethnic units,” implicitly on peoples in connection with national culture, receives depth and originality through the analysis of the role of feelings/“national feelings” in the lives and development of nations. “We think of the feelings of love for the country and the nation.”<sup>18</sup> It is not possible to pass from a people’s inactive state to that of national life and self-awareness without strengthening the national feelings, patriotism and the consciousness of belonging to the national community, argued Xenopol.

*The peoples who lost their patriotism are dead for history. If, generally, history makes you love mankind, the history of the people you belong to will open the love for it. Thus, there is no higher power to revive patriotism than the history of your own people.*<sup>19</sup>

Acting as a psychological element of unity, playing the part of the bond meant to reinforce the people's unity, to consolidate the national soul and the nation itself, patriotism was studied and analyzed by Xenopol in dozens of pages of his works. In addition, he was constantly active in the public area, as an academic, rector, public personality, participating in numerous scientific congresses, fighting extremism, xenophobia and cosmopolitanism with persuasive arguments.

Referring to the educational mission of scholars, Xenopol, the rector of the University of Jassy, said: "I do not think that I am wrong when I say that there cannot be another direction than that aiming for the strengthening of the nation, for the Romanian people's spiritual assertion."<sup>20</sup> In this regard, all intellectuals necessarily had to be involved in the militant activities of the Romanian people, not only the men of letters and the historians, but also the scientists, because that was the only way to enrich in full harmony the universal civilization. The formation and the development of the patriotic consciousness strengthen the people's life and the nation.

According to Xenopol, "the holy phrase of love for your country" has the following meaning: first, there is the love for the place where we were born, which, by extension to all the country becomes for us "a second nature." The second element is the love for the people we belong to, for the nation with its specific soul. Then comes the consciousness of the past, based on the acknowledgment of the history of the people. Furthermore, patriotism has a rational corollary: the conscience of the national ideals, of the distinct interests related to those of other nations. All these imply wisdom, good relations with other nations, cooperation, love and esteem for other people and nations. National feelings must be driven by reason, must be enlightened in order to avoid hatred, aggression, animosities and disdain towards other nations. The awakening of the national conscience and feelings relies not only on the education of the youth, on the development of communication and of the national spirit; it also builds on the economic development of the country, on the occurrence of new complex professions, on a high productivity meant to improve the material life of the entire nation. The last elements were appreciated by Xenopol as being "the strongest lever on which political interests can rely."<sup>21</sup> Synthetically considered, patriotism is that natural feeling imprinted upon the soul and the heart of a people as a reflection of the "entire nation's icon."<sup>22</sup>

From these positions, Xenopol successfully criticized the socialist, cosmopolitan, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and irredentist theories of his time which promoted violent solutions (class struggle, ethnic cleansing, the oppression and marginalization of some ethnic groups etc.) and the brutal approach to the national issues, opposing to them the humanistic, rational and balanced variant of patriotism, which he called "sound patriotism." "Patriotism is sound when reason operates alongside individual interest. We love our country as we can live easier and better in it . . . *We love it because the country supports our existence*, and when it fails we emigrate."<sup>23</sup> The attitude towards other nations, states and ethnicities must be shaped from the perspective of a rational, moderate and wise nationalism.<sup>24</sup>



## Instead of Conclusions

**G**ROUNDED IN his scholarly research, Xenopol's outlook on nation, national state, culture and patriotism is valid even now. The research methods he used allowed him to approach from an ethnical-historical and anthropological perspective the natural unity between the national specificity and the common fundamental features of peoples and nations. The material and cultural development of each people after the fall of empires in the European area and the proper answer to the national question would strengthen the national identity, the "national soul," in tight connection with the common cultural heritage of mankind. Xenopol sees the formation of new relations between nations, namely, a post-imperialist establishment relying on the observance of the national principle in the cooperation between all peoples and nations for the achievement of their happiness, together with the happiness of the entire humanity. In this evolution, the national feelings and the national soul are like a binder of human communities, constituting the essential factors for the development of civilization and for the evolution of the feelings of respect for mankind's values.

During his entire life, Xenopol demonstrated a vivid patriotism, manifested at all levels: as a writer, scholar, educator, and public person. Starting with the Junimea stage, he considered himself a nationalist, loving his country and his people ever since he was born: "and I have remained one so far and therefore I hope to still be one when I die."<sup>25</sup> In the end, we have to point out that his ideas on people, nation, culture and national feeling are not random, nor issued from different circumstances, even if he revised them in various stages of his life and in different writings, but they belong to a new system of opinions.

Even during his life, Xenopol's work had a wide echo in the European area. A large amount of his ideas and scientific analyses entered the circuit of European values being received and acknowledged by great European scholars and philosophers. The French philosopher Henri Berr appreciated that "his work is one of the most important contributions to the theory of history of the last years."<sup>26</sup> In the same spirit, Francisco Elías de Tejada appreciated his writings as having universal dimensions going beyond the borders of his country.



## Notes

1. D. D. Roșca, Foreword to Gheorghe Toma, *Xenopol despre logica istoriei* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1971), 8.
2. Constantin Schifirneț, "Conceptia lui A. D. Xenopol despre națiune: Studiu introductiv," in A. D. Xenopol, *Națiunea română: Antologie*, edited by C. Schifirneț (Bucharest: Albatros, 1999), V.
3. A. D. Xenopol, *La Théorie de l'histoire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Des principes fondamentaux de l'histoire* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908).

4. A. D. Xenopol, "Factorii statornici ai istoriei," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 1.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895), 1.
7. Xenopol, "Naționalismul," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 197.
8. Ibid., 199.
9. A. D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, 13 vols. (Iași, 1896–1912).
10. A. D. Xenopol, "Unitatea sufletului românesc," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 214.
11. A. D. Xenopol, "Cultura națională," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 71.
12. Ibid., 73.
13. Ibid., 97.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 139.
16. Ibid., 140.
17. Ibid., 142.
18. With Xenopol the phrase "feelings of love for nation and country" has the same meaning as the notions of patriotism or moderate/rational nationalism.
19. A. D. Xenopol, "Lección de deschidere a cursului de istoria românilor de la Universitatea din Iași," *Convorbiri literare* (Iași) 17, 8 (1 November 1883): 306.
20. A. D. Xenopol, "Cuvântare inaugurală a Rectoratului," *Arhiva Societății Științifice și Literare din Iași* 9, 11–12 (1898): 609–610.
21. A. D. Xenopol, "Expoziția și ideea unității naționale," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 193.
22. A. D. Xenopol, "Patriotismul," in *Națiunea română: Antologie*, 188.
23. A. D. Xenopol, "Naționalismul," *Noua Revistă Română* (Bucharest) 5, 3 (26 Oct. 1908): 38.
24. A. D. Xenopol, "Naționalism și antisemitism," *Noua Revistă Română* 5, 18 (8 Feb. 1909): 276–278.
25. Xenopol, "Cultura națională," 69–143.
26. Henri Berr, *L'Histoire traditionnelle et la synthèse historique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1921), 41.

### Abstract

#### A. D. Xenopol the European: The Viability of the Concept of Nation and the National Feeling

The paper investigates the ideas of Romanian scholar A. D. Xenopol (1847–1920) on nation, national culture and national feeling, highlighting the contents of these notions and their role in the historical evolution of mankind. The scholarly research carried out by Xenopol, his ideas and conclusions ensure the viability and permanence of his works, as his theoretical approaches are conceived and devised as answers to the practical and political issues of his time. His historical vision sought a future international order relying on the implementation of the principle of national autonomy, independence and equality. Xenopol's ideas on nation and patriotism, and their European character, remain valid even in the time of globalization and of the construction of a planetary civilization.

### Keywords

philosophy of history, nation, national culture, patriotism