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# P A R A D I G M S

## The Second Hundred Years' War (1914–2014) Geopolitical Implications for Romania

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*In 1914 a world war bursts into history. Is it still ongoing today, in various forms?*

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**România în epoca modernizării  
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Romania** (2013).

### **General Considerations**

**A**FTER 1991 the historians' debate on globalization has taken a number of turns towards the possible historical classification of the last decades. Other professionals have joined in: political scientists, journalists, politicians, and many others, more or less connected with the domain, but most of them with variable, measurable, and rewarding interests. Thus, phrases such as "a new Cold War," "back to a bipolar world" (or multipolar), or even "the Second Hundred Years' War" have recently come into the limelight.

Among the first authors to write about the "new Cold War" was Gilbert Achcar in 1999.<sup>1</sup> Taking on his idea, as well as on Neagu Djuvara's book *Războiul de șaptezeci de ani și premisele hegemoniei americane (1914–1991)*<sup>2</sup> (The Seventy Years' War and the premises of American hegemony, 1914–1991), we suggested integrating the concept of a "new Cold War" in a more detailed

analysis starting from the periodization of a “Second Hundred Years’ War.” Subsequent research found the phrase “Second Hundred Years’ War” in an article by the American journalist Barry Casselman.<sup>3</sup> As far as we are concerned, this phrase represents a pretext for an analysis of the current situation in Europe and Romania with facts contextualized and compared against those from 1914. Additionally, we aim to outline the stages of the period 1914–2014.

The main argument of this perspective is that the period 2008–2014 (the crisis in Georgia and Ukraine) indicates the return to a “logic of conflict” typical of the year 1914. In fact, as early as the 1990s, some analysts foresaw that Europe might go back to the “interwar model” of political disputes.

In anticipation of some criticism from professional historians who might object to the research method, this is a good place to prevent the readers that we will adopt a political, even discursive perspective, as it is more appropriate for a “stroll through the century” and for a meditation on the current period.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we propose a number of observations, premises, and especially questions regarding the developments in international politics and the situation of Romania throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A first issue is the structure of this period, which is essential to understanding the cause-effect chain and in order to justify a comparison. We propose the following stages, partly based on the already established timeline, but integrated in the economy of the Hundred Years’ War and complete with some new ones:

- the First World War (1914–1918);
- the interwar armistice (1918–1939);
- the Second World War (1939–1945);
- the Cold War (1945–1990/1991);
- the post–Cold War armistice (1990/1991–2008/2014);
- the Second Cold War (2008/2014–?).

Then, starting from the identified time segments, we will go on to outline the main features of each stage, which will clarify their intrinsic implications but also help us place them in a wider context of historical (dis)continuities.

**L**OOKING AT the events surrounding the First World War (1914–1918) and the implications it had for Romania, we notice that the Romanian state was poorly prepared from the military and economic point of view. The country had gone through political disputes around the imminent alliance with one or the other blocs (the Entente or the Central Powers). Once the choice was made, in August 1916, the Western Allies, and especially Russia, failed to honor their commitments as stipulated in the military Convention, which resulted in isolating Romania and increasing its war effort to unbearable levels. Apparently, even to this day, regardless of the political regime, Russia has kept its

ways unchanged, which can only be a bad omen for Romania. The financial collapse of the British Empire, followed by its political and territorial disintegration, had a snowball effect on its smaller European Allies, including Romania. The difficulties caused by the length of the frontline, by the country's economic and military weakness, and by the Allies, were compensated for by Ionel Brătianu's tactful diplomatic efforts, and the army performed quite impressively in combat, far beyond its technical and operational capability. Then, Romania had a historic opportunity in the fall of the two neighboring powers: the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian empires. After 1918, Romania saw a change in its European status—it became a mid-ranking country, number 7 and 8 by territory and population. Also, it became a relatively important actor in international relations, anyway far above the status it had had by 1914.

During the interwar “armistice” (1918–1939), Romania relied on the Versailles “system,” but also tried joining some regional alliances (the Little Entente, the Balkan Entente) and bilateral treaties (with France and Poland), all derived from the original strategy of maintaining a status quo. As a matter of fact, Romania stood by its Western Allies until the summer of 1940 when, forced by the context—territorial dismemberment and the pressure of revisionist states—it found itself entering the German sphere of influence. This is a historical fact too easily overlooked in Western political circles. In Romania, the authoritarian regime would only be established in 1938, even though many other European countries had tried this type of political experiment (even with a totalitarian edge) considerably earlier.

We must also remark that Romania was a victim of the constant decline of the Allied side in the First World War: the United States of America took the path of idealism in the sense of focusing on its domestic affairs to the point of virtual noninvolvement in Europe's problems. Great Britain had its share of economic difficulties and was losing its grip on the colonies. France was under great stress because of political disputes and a lack of vision regarding its military strategy. For its part, Romania, with its still weak economy relying on the exports of raw materials (food and oil), was badly hit by the economic crisis of 1929–1933 which lingered in this part of Europe until the Second World War.

In home politics, after the unification laws, too little was done for the deep structure consolidation of the Great Union; only too late did it become clear that it was necessary to have a state-of-the-art army. In external policy, the support of the Allies was taken for granted; moreover, Romanian diplomacy put the country's interests second for the sake of their principles, which would later be underestimated anyway.

Another problem was the internal political disputes that peaked to bloody conflict and murder, which further weakened the country by the summer of 1940.

One perhaps marginal explanation for this comes from daily life, especially in the capital's elite circles: at the time there was a preoccupation for recovering the assets lost in the Great War, which diverted attention from the dangers looming on the country's borders.

During the Second World War (1939–1945), Romania was, again, too small a country for “such a big war” and found itself again between two “forces of evil”: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. For the second time, the Romanian army was poorly equipped and trained, and its officers were stuck making bad decisions in a series of crucial moments (June 1940, August–September 1940, the crossing of the Dniester River, etc.). Just as in the Great War, the sacrifice of over 800,000 people, out of whom 170,000 on the Western front, saved a large portion of the country's territory, and the nullification of the Vienna Dictate is the direct consequence of this contribution.

Unlike the end of the First World War, when the Great Powers had a decisive contribution to the unification and re-establishment of the states in the center and east of Europe, after 1945 this space was given up to Soviet domination. In this context, Romania lost Bessarabia, the north of Bukovina, Herza and the Quadrilateral. Then followed a fifteen-year period of isolation; only at the beginning of the 1960s did Romania resume its political and economic ties with the West.

The Cold War period between 1945 and 1990/1991 is subdivided into several stages determined by internal and external factors including Stalin's death (1953), the Sino-Soviet clash of ideology (in the early 1960s), the Declaration of Independence (April 1964), Nicolae Ceaușescu's coming to power (March 1965), the Czechoslovakian crisis (August 1968), Ceaușescu's visits to China and North Korea (1971), the 1977 earthquake (for its economic effects), Nicolae Ceaușescu's decision to pay Romania's external debt (early 1980s), and the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev as head of the Soviet Union (1985).

From a political perspective, Romania was to remain for this entire period of time behind the Iron Curtain established by the Western Allied powers and the Soviet Union in the wake of the Second World War, with significant differences between various stages and moments as to its connections with the West.

The new world order (with twice as many independent states) created the necessary conditions for Romania's economic development, as well as for that of “third world” countries. The growth in all branches of the economy (albeit pushed hard towards the end of this period) entailed a general improvement as compared to the interwar period.

The new international context, the country's new status, as well as Nicolae Ceaușescu's ambitions, enabled Romania to play a vital role in some postwar international events: the Sino-American relationships, the Middle East crisis,

some UNO resolutions, etc. This historical stage prepared the way for globalization, with its positive and negative effects.

The post–Cold War armistice (1990/1991–2008/2014) sees Romania return to the “free world,” its main external political goals being to join NATO and the European Union. The consequences of the 9/11 events and the USA’s new defense strategy enabled Romania to join NATO in 2004. Globalization, the restructuring of political and economic relationships in the world, and in Europe and Asia in particular, speeded up the EU expansion and so Romania became a full member in 2007.

Romania has gained recognition—through its contribution and the sacrifice of the military—as an active and reliable member of NATO. On the other hand, Romania “has earned its accession to, but missed (in the sense of delayed) its integration” in the EU.

After 2007, Romania is still struggling to define, build and implement a national strategy. The political environment is dominated by sterile fights for power and easy money among various sides of a hybrid elite—from downright criminals to intellectuals. All sectors of the economy are marred by excessive political involvement. In the name of democracy, economic freedom, the right to free expression, and the fight against corruption, Romania has become the playground of foreign states, multinationals, and Romanian and international citizens with a criminal record. After 1990, the access into the country of informative entities had devastating effects for the national interest. It will probably take another generation to return to normality.

The Second Cold War (2008/2014–?). After the conflicts in Georgia and, more recently, Ukraine, more and more “observers” (historians, journalists, political analysts, etc.) have come to accept the description of the current stage as a return to the “logic of the Cold War.” In a multipolar world, we witness numerous conflicts, with uniformed regiments, with regiments in uniforms without insignia, with mercenaries hired on ideological or religious grounds, etc. Romania, along with other East-European countries, is the victim of Putin’s Russian aggression, of the weak and disparate reaction of the EU and NATO, of Germany’s multidirectional game, and of the American lack of strategic vision (or maybe just the lack of interest in this part of the world, as compared to the Pacific). Thus, once again, Romania, lacking a national project supported by the entire political elite and by its citizens, fails to present a clear, coherent, credible, and universally assumed response to the challenges of the new geopolitical situation in this region.

## General Remarks

**S**TARTING FROM the brief analysis of the main internal and international factors of the last century, we propose a set of questions meant to open new debate perspectives on this topic.

In 1914 a world war bursts into history. Is it still ongoing today, in various forms?<sup>5</sup>

Is this assessment justified by the return, in 2008/2014, to a logic of conflict?

Can we consider that a post-Cold War armistice is concluded in 1991?

If we accept the phrase “New Russia,” can we also speak of a “new Cold War,” albeit devoid of its ideological component?

Did the Western management of the Yugoslavian crisis<sup>6</sup> leave some diplomatic gaps that Russia took advantage of after 2008?

Did 9/11 and the solidarity between the US and Russia against terrorism only delay the new conflict?

Who is on the offensive: the West, Russia, or both?

To what extent does the level of trust indicate the status of the relationship between the two sides of this conflict, and especially between the US and Russia?

Where are we now to put up a new “Berlin Wall,” as it were: on the Pruth River? On the Dniester? The Dnieper? The Don?

Has the American lack of interest in the Eastern Europe after 2008 (in favor of the Pacific region) accelerated Russia’s radical position?

How did the economic crisis influence the European and world relations of power?

Was the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest a mere pretext, or the last straw in stirring the conflict?<sup>7</sup>

The current crisis was also triggered by cultural differences: the association agreements of Moldova and Ukraine with the EU were perceived in the West as a technicality, but did Russia give them a strong political meaning?

Provided we accept the idea that Russia returns to a logic of conflict typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, should we reply in the same language, with a modified logic, or a combined one?

Should we worry about Andrei Pleșu’s opinion about the ability and responsibility of the current world leaders to decide upon international relationships? (He says: “I’ve said it before: having dealt with most of the important world leaders one way or another over two years, I have come to the conclusion that I am presented with the proof of God’s existence. Because only rarely have I witnessed a match between the tasks laid before these leaders and their ability to carry them out. And so I have come to believe that, since the world seems to still go on even with such power holders, it must be the hand of Providence...”)<sup>8</sup>

Is it possible to have a war without human losses? And, apart from professional military personnel, are there other soldiers willing to give their life for principles and national rights?



To what extent will economic interference, the multinationals, and Russia's resources influence political and diplomatic decisions?

Has there been an understanding (for a few years now) between Russia and Germany regarding the eastern border of the European Union?

What role will Hungary play in this part of Europe, as it is supported by Russia, tolerated by Brussels, encouraged by the diaspora as well as by some right-wing forces inside the European Union?

Will the current crisis lead to the consolidation of the European Union and NATO, or just of NATO?

Will we see a movement from the "peaceful coexistence" of the first Cold War to a "peaceful co-evolution" by avoiding conflicts and mutual support for the development of resources?

Does Russia's action envisage an advantageous position in the future negotiations with the European Union and the USA? Is this how we should explain the support Russia has shown to the federalization of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine?

Does the recent European-Asian Union mark a point of advantage for Russia?

Does Russia need this crisis in order to redefine itself inside and outside its borders?

Has the Scotland referendum closed or opened another old issue of Europe? Do concessions solve or deepen a crisis?

Are we on the verge of post-democracy?

## Remarks on Romania

**H**ISTORY HAS shown that, during the last century, Romania was somehow on the wrong foot in difficult moments.<sup>9</sup> In the last twenty-five years, although it joined NATO and the EU, the Romanian diplomats have shown weakness, incoherence, a lack of attitude and joint support from the political class. It is enough to compare it to Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps we, and the politicians, should ask ourselves: how did East Germany adapt so quickly to the new economic system? How come Czechoslovakia has not put its industry down? Why has Hungary not undermined its agriculture? How did Poland avoid the economic crisis? Why is Bulgaria always ahead of us in tourism? How come the former Yugoslavian republics—after a devastating war—now breed elite sportsmen? And all of them have better roads than ours!

Currently, Romania is in desperate need of a new national project. We must be aware that we are the largest country in the south-east of Europe and that the matter of the borders will never again be renegotiated. The international conferences and treaties, as well as the sacrifice of over 1,500,000 Romanians in the two world wars, should be sufficient defense against any such threat.

It is necessary to create a universal solidarity among all political parties, civil society, and public opinion on the national interests. Romania must capitalize on its geographical position at the crossroads between East and West, North and South, as it has a real potential to become a model for the eastern and south-eastern part of Europe. One such model is the way it institutionalized the relationship between majority and minorities.

Romania can play an important role in EU and NATO policies on the East—with the current events still unfolding—especially since, lately, just Poland and Romania have been still standing by the commitments they made upon joining NATO and the EU.

Romanian diplomacy should be more active and alert to the various “axes,” be they publicly asserted or discrete: Moscow–Washington, Moscow–Berlin, Moscow–Budapest, Moscow–Beijing, Moscow–Sofia, Moscow–Belgrade, and so on.

Also, it should pay more attention to the relationship with the Republic of Moldova, given its many hesitations on the way from East to West, even at a time of strong pro-European and pro-Romanian assertions.

Romania needs to be more sensitive than other countries to recent events, for a number of reasons: we have been around Russia for three hundred years, we have had our share of invasions (thirteen), and we have always had neighbors willing to take advantage of such an opportunity.

NATO cannot defend us against an unconventional or psychological war—i.e., the manipulation, in many ways, of some political forces, of the NGOs, the of media, the public opinion, etc.

Romania must cautiously assess the attitude of the West, which is known to hold different positions, in the current crisis, for each country (maybe as a result of the above-listed factors, apart from some other economic interests).

The pro-American option must be strongly and persistently upheld, and observed in keeping with Western, not Balkan, standards.

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## Notes

1. Gilbert Achcar, *Noul război rece: Lumea după Kosovo*, trans. (Bucharest, 2002).
2. Neagu Djuvara, *Războiul de șaptezeci de ani și premisele hegemoniei americane (1914–1991)* (Bucharest, 2010).
3. <http://barrycasselman.blogspot.ro/2012/12/the-praire-editor-new-hundre-years.htm> (accessed on 10.09.2014).
4. See Urs Altermatt, *Previziunile de la Sarajevo: Etnonaționalismul în Europa*, trans. (Iași, 2000); Arnaud Blin, Gérard Chaliand, and François Gere, eds., *Puteri și influențe: Anuar de geopolitică și geostrategie 2000–2001*, trans. (Bucharest, 2001); Pascal Boniface,



- Vers la Quatrième Guerre mondiale?* (Paris, 2005); id., ed., *Atlas des relations internationales* (Paris, 2003); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah: Supremația americană și imperatiile sale strategice*, trans. (Bucharest, 2000); R. J. Crampton, *Europa năsariteană în secolul al XX-lea... și după*, trans. (Bucharest, 2002); Martin McCauley, *Rusia, America și războiul rece, 1949–1991*, trans. (Iași, 1999); Hervé Macquart, *Thèmes d'actualité géopolitiques* (Paris, 2006); Loukas Tsoukalis, *Ce fel de Europă?*, trans. (Bucharest, 2005); Maurice Vaisse, *Les relations internationales depuis 1945* (Paris, 2004).
5. <http://barrycasselman.blogspot.ro/2012/12/the-praire-editor-new-hundre-years.htm> (accessed on 10.09.2014).
  6. See Dr. Nicolae Nițu and Iulian Nițu, *Destnămareea Jugoslaviei* (Bucharest, 2006); Doina Mureșan, *Securitate și insecuritate în Balcanii de Vest: criza interetnică din noua federație iugoslavă* (Bucharest, 2008).
  7. See Iulian Chifu and Monica Oproiu, *Războiul ruso-georgian: Reacțiile decidenților în timpul crizei* (Bucharest, 2009).
  8. Andrei Pleșu, *Din vorbă-n vorbă: 23 de ani de întrebări și răspunsuri* (Bucharest, 2013), 443 sq.
  9. See Mihail E. Ionescu, *România Orientală—160 de ani (1848–2009)* (Bucharest, 2009).
  10. Pleșu, 44 sq.

## Abstract

### The Second Hundred Years' War (1914–2014): Geopolitical Implications for Romania

In the present article, we suggest integrating the concept of a “new Cold War” in a more detailed analysis starting from the periodization of a “Second Hundred Years' War,” a phrase we later found in an article by the American journalist Barry Casselman. This phrase offers a pretext for an analysis of the current situation in Europe and Romania with facts contextualized and compared against those from 1914. Additionally, we aim to outline the stages of the period 1914–2014. We contend that the period 2008–2014 (the crisis in Georgia and Ukraine) indicates the return to a “logic of conflict” typical of the year 1914. The adopted perspective is politological, even discursive, as it is more appropriate for a “stroll through the century” and for a meditation on the current period. Therefore, we propose a number of observations, premises, and especially questions regarding the developments in international politics and the situation of Romania throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Keywords

the Second Hundred Years' War, the interwar armistice, the Cold War, the post–Cold War armistice, the Second Cold War