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Review of Bocancea's "Je suis Charlie?: Regândirea libertății în Europa multiculturală"

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Christianity, to sacramental movements in North America independent of Orthodoxy. The two contributions to the fourth section concern the relationship of Orthodoxy to Islam in historical perspective. Central to the fifth section is politics and Orthodoxy, which includes an essay by Anna Briskin-Müller on the reception of Moscow as the “new Rome” idea that is particularly relevant. The sixth section raises “questions for the future,” which includes the prolonged process of preparation for the Pan-orthodox Council.

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***Je suis Charlie?: Regândirea libertății în Europa multiculturală (Je suis Charlie?: The Rethinking of Freedom in Multicultural Europe).* Edited by Sorin Bocancea, Preface by Thierry de Montbrial (Iași, România: Adenium Publishing, 2015), ISBN:978-606-742-092-0.**

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The beginning of April 2016 brought some quite unexpected news for Romania: two young Muslim women were assaulted by a group of young Romanians in a very busy intersection of Romania’s capital, Bucharest. The reason was that the young women were wearing an Islamic headscarf. Wearing such a headscarf is unusual in Romania and it is very often associated with radical religious options. This type of violence became a press event for two reasons: first of all, because the level of security and safety is very high on the streets of every town in Romania, and secondly, because religious motivated violence has been unheard of on the streets of our country for the past 50 years.

The emergence of such a violent manifestation can be explained by the perception in Romania of Islamic terrorist acts in Europe. Last year’s two terrorist attacks in Paris, but

mostly the more recent terrorist attacks of March 22, 2016, in Brussels, had a strong negative impact on Romanians as European citizens, particularly regarding their perceptions and representations of Islam. These negative representations, often expressed in the virtual space, have also been reinforced to a certain degree by the anti-Islam and anti-immigration speech of public persons considered to be representative in Romania of what is usually referred to as a “democratic culture” and who are associated with the democratization of the Romanian public space.

It is beyond any doubt that one of the effects of Islamic terrorist actions on European soil is an increase of intolerance towards practitioners of the Muslim religion. On the level of the general public, and sometimes even on the level of the cultural elites, the distinction between the religious tradition of Islam and political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism is not understood. Moreover, it is important to note that on top of this, religiously-motivated terrorism seems to be a less known phenomenon to the European public, and in particular to the young public of Romania.

In this context of ambiguities related to Islam and terrorism motivated by religion, I believe that a publishing event such as the volume edited by Sorin Bocancea (ed.), *Je suis Charlie?: the rethinking of freedom in multicultural Europe* is a very important one, as it includes texts written by Romanian authors who expressed their opinions and analyzed the terrorist attack in Paris against the satirical publication Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015. These attacks had a significant impact on the public perception in Romania and led to a vivid press debate regarding the relationship between religion and politics, multicultural policies, secularization and religious freedom, redefining the role of religion in the public space. Therefore, we can see that a violent act carried out in the heart of Europe has consequences on the mentality changes in a cultural space situated at the geographical periphery of Europe, in Romania, a country that is located on the Eastern border of the European Union. Given the

existence of media communication, the relationship between the center and the periphery becomes much more complex, and in some cases, differences become very fluid or even disappear.

Bocancea gathered in this volume some of the most representative texts published by Romanian authors—specialists in social sciences or journalists—on this subject, in the period immediately following the Paris attacks. These cultural and journalistic reactions actually represent an account of the types of attitudes that have manifested themselves in regard to religious terrorism.

The opinions expressed in the book are diverse and concern the multiple facets of interpretation: some have highlighted the importance of freedom and the fact that the attack targeted the freedom of speech, a fundamental value of European civilization; others believed that the terrorist attack was provoked by the attitude of the journalists who satirized Islam and other religions in an improper manner by publishing a series of caricatures featuring prophet Mohamed or caricatures that targeted other religions; other authors have accused multiculturalism as practiced in Europe and the harmful effects of multicultural policies amid an incapacity of political leaders to manage public policies of this nature; others brought back the debates concerning the issue of “political correctness,” its harmful effects on social practices and the totalitarian character of policies influenced by the term; there were also those who concluded we are in the middle of a conflict of civilizations that was long foreseen and that is constantly intensifying.

Naturally, the culprits for the attacks were also looked for—and that sparked a whole dispute. The emotional debate on guilt was well synthesized by Sorin Bocancea, the coordinator of the volume: “accusations were issued in multiple directions: towards the French authorities (who seemed to lack the ability to keep control over their own minorities), towards the supporters of the ideology of political correctness (who for many years now

impose the rule of various minorities that symbolically suffocate and anesthetize the majorities), towards the supporters of neoliberalism (the politics of which would have created the premises for such an event), towards the terrorist movements from the Islamic world (because they turn to violence), towards the editorial room of Charlie Hebdo (for their editorial policy and because they presumably and purposefully caused the event, although they have been warned and received threats), towards Islam (thought to be violent per se) and towards Christianity (believed to be too peaceful and exhausted).”

This diversity of possible ‘culprits’ is based on the fact that, although the volume attempts to give a coherent and unified vision of the phenomenon, it is marked by the fragmented views of the different authors. They bring forward a single aspect that is of interest to them and that reveals a partial truth, which the author then proposes as a solution for interpreting the terrorist acts and the context in which they took place. The book fulfills its unifying purpose given the inspired way in which the coordinator brings together this diversity of opinions in its six parts: 1) “Freedom of speech. Pleads, critiques and fears,” 2) “The problems of the European world: neoliberalism, disagreements and hegemony,” 3) “The problems of the Islamic world,” 4) “The clash of civilizations,” 5) “Universal human problems,” 6) “Representations of the Charlie Hebdo case.” These pieces are reunited in a puzzle that, on the one side, gives the image of the complexity of challenges that religious terrorism brings into the democratic society, and, on the other side, of the limits of democratic societies when confronted with a phenomenon that defies the rules of ethical action and of the rule of law.

The problem of religious terrorism proves to be of increasing complexity for Europeans, who find out that the attackers are no longer an enemy from the outside, but young Europeans, raised in the European civilization, who carry out attacks—even suicide attacks—against their own civilization. It is true that they were the subjects of radicalization

processes in the closed Islamic communities to which they belonged or that they participated in training programs in terrorist centers in the Near East, and then returned home waiting to be activated by the fundamentalist networks. Although this topic is debated by the authors, including Nicu Gavriluță, it is still difficult to generate a coherent answer that would clarify the reasons young people from a world of freedom of speech end up using a vision of religion as motivation for killing those who have a contrary belief to the one they hold.

A large part of the debates in this volume revolves around the necessity for Europeans to defend their own values, as shown in the text by Constantin Ilaș. One of the most important values for author Doru Pop is precisely freedom of speech, which can suffer no limitation in the name of other values or in the name of increasing the level of community or individual security. On the same note, any limitation of freedoms—an idea that also appeared in debates in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova—is considered by author Vitale Ciobanu to represent surrender to terrorism and to violence, which would entail yielding Western values.

The idea that citizens should give up part of their freedom in the name of security and accept a series of new restrictions imposed by law appeared in debates both across Europe and in Romania. I think it is important to mention that in his text from this volume, Radu Carp argues that diminishing freedom of speech can be realized only by the limitation brought by our own ethical conscience. And in this regard, there is no need for establishing more restrictive legislative regulations, only for applying the existent law in France and in all European countries where the state of law functions. Applying the principles of the state of law would be a weapon strong enough to defeat terrorism in Europe and to avoid such manifestations in Romania.

Although I have my reservations in presenting messages based on ideologically-shaped emotional reactions, I have to mention that the volume does not lack explanations that

link terrorist attacks to the way the European Union and the United States of America act as actors of international relations, particularly concerning their policies of intervention in the ongoing conflicts in the Near East. This is why author Dan Tomozei considers that the danger of fundamentalism in Europe is a result of a wrongly understood globalism. Other authors consider that another mistake made by Europe is its “euro centrism” attitude, manifested especially through the special attention given to victims of violence in the Western space and the lack of empathy for the victims of terrorism in other cultural spaces. Author Iulia Badea Guéritée emphasizes that the indifference of Westerners in relation to the suffering of others is a possible source of future violent acts that might occur in the European space. This is one of the possible sources of anti-Western behavior as seen in the Islamic speech, an idea underlined by author Vasile Ostaciuc. From the speech against the West, we can easily reach the perspectives of a conflict of civilizations and Ovidiu Nahoi’s text is emblematic in this sense.

Beyond the particular elements that are brought about by each text comprised in the volume, one of the fundamental questions is related to the condition of Western civilization and its freedoms. The answer to the question “What do we do with our freedom?” is still pending. Probably other volumes already announced by Adenium Publishing will reveal stronger nuances to this topic and might configure an answer. The merit of this volume resides in facilitating a debate meant to clarify the motivations behind such acts of violence, including the one that targeted the journalists in the Charlie Hebdo editorial room. At the same time, the book aims to explain the impact of religiously-motivated terrorist attacks. Concentrating such a complex debate in one volume is meant to bring to the attention of the Romanian and of the Western public the new context in which the discussion about religion is no longer just an issue of religious freedom, but also encompasses the new pressure put on the legislative system and on the rethinking of institutional structures meant to defend the

security of individuals and communities. It is in this context that the solidarity between those who said “*Je suis Charlie*” and the victims of the terrorist attacks must be understood.

This type of debate should lead not only to a better understanding of the phenomenon brought to the reader’s attention, but also to a clarification of the attitudes that should be assumed as desirable. More debates in the Romanian and European space on terrorism and religious fundamentalism should have an important role in stressing the differences that the public must perceive in terms of religious traditions and any forms of radicalism that might occur inside those religions. At the same time, these debates should create a favorable environment for cultivating tolerance not only among the direct participants in the debate, but also among different categories of public that have access to this debate. It is an important step in avoiding an increase in religious violence, even minor events, such as the one described at the beginning of our text. A misunderstanding of the differences between actions of radical religious movements and manifestations of religious identity can lead to an increase of violence in relation to alterity, even in everyday life conditions, as happened in the story of the two Muslim girls who became victims of the intolerance of young people who were roughly the same age, but with different beliefs. I believe that the volume coordinated by Sorin Bocancea can have a positive impact on public debates in the Romanian society, with its specific culture at the Eastern border of the European Union.